

Convocation 2005

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Jai Guru!

Convocation 2005

At the Volunteers Meeting on the Saturday before Convocation, Brother Paramananda read the following announcement from "Cosmic Airlines". This was written by a young volunteer. The story goes this way: The volunteer was trying on her blue and white "volunteer uniform" when her Dad commented that she looked like an Airlines stewardess. So she decided to write a "Cosmic Airlines Welcome Announcement", and her Dad passed it on to Brother Paramananda to share with the Volunteers. Jai Guru!

Welcome to Cosmic Airlines

Welcome to Cosmic Airlines. Our final destination is Cosmic Consciousness. Before arrival, it will be necessary to leave all your baggage behind. Be sure to catch your connections for the astral and causal planes when we arrive at Medulla-Lotus International. Our captain for all eternity is Paramahansa Yogananda. We will be cruising at an attitude of no fear.

We'll have a brief week-long stop off in Los Angeles, where the Guru will assist you during Convocation. Your flight attendants are the monks and nuns of Self-Realization Fellowship. Meditation techniques have been provided for your comfort and convenience.

You may have experienced turbulence entering the new Yuga. Floatation devices will be provided for you under your seat during group meditation. Please keep in the upright position. Please remain calm at all times. If the cabin should lose pressure, please enter samadhi. Remain upright in yoga posture and fasten your Kriya beads. Armrests are available. Should the plane need to make an emergency landing at any time, remember you are an immortal soul and your last thought in this life will carry on to the next world.

Prasad will be served. The main course is love, with devotion for dessert. During your journey you're sure to meet friends once more to be. We're the only airline where you receive 75% free bonus miles for every 25 you travel.

When you reach your final destination, ask one of the six beings in ochre uniform about a free return trip as a volunteer. Here at Cosmic Airlines we strive to get you OM faster.

Thank you for taking the high route to the Infinite. We hope your trip is Divine!

A Tribute to Brother Bhaktananda

Sunday Service at Hollywood Temple - Brother Ishtananda

"Greetings and love to all of you," Brother Ishtananda said. "In 1972 when I first started attending the Hollywood Temple Services, I noticed that Brother Bhaktananda often began his talks with this: 'Greetings and love to all of you.' After I became a monk and was leading the Temple Services, one day I asked Brother, 'Is it okay to use the same greeting, or is it copyrighted? (Laughter) "How did you come up with it?' Brother Bhaktananda told me, "Master used to say, "Greetings to all of you", and I just added 'love'."

"This past April, at age 90, Brother Bhaktananda passed, and so today I want to talk about Brother, and what we can learn from his life."

"Even something as mundane as Brother Bhaktananda's appearance impressed me. He was always immaculately dressed, impeccable. Over the years he was always that way. You see that quality in *all* the disciples of Master. This stemmed from Master; Guruji was always well-dressed and neat. In the *Autobiography*, we read how Mukunda's mother always bathed and dressed the children before their father came home from work. Master encouraged this in all his devotees - to dress with care, and respectfully. He considered it very important; in fact, every once in a while Master would hold a class for the lay disciples entitled, 'Grooming and Personal Care'."

There is a story about a monk in India who always wore an ochre robe of silk instead of the traditional cotton robe. When criticized by others he replied, "The lover always dresses well for the Beloved." It is the *attitude* with which you approach the Divine that matters. When you are in any sacred space, enter with an attitude of reverence and devotion so that there will be that receptivity to the vibrations there. The proper attitude puts us in a frame of mind to receive God's blessings. So even in Brother Bhaktananda's dress there is a lesson for us.

Another quality Brother exemplified was divine simplicity. He was the embodiment of spiritual simplicity. He was unencumbered by life because he simplified even little things so as not to waste time. He simplified *everything*, even eating. "With meals around the ashram it was every man for himself," Brother Ishtananda reminisced. "One morning I made myself a bowl of hot cornmeal. Then I noticed some cream cheese, so I put some of that on top. Then I found some syrup, so I stirred in some of that too, and then sat down to eat. A few minutes later Brother Bhaktananda came into the room and started heating up some cornmeal. I thought he might appreciate hearing about my new-found discovery and so I said, 'If you put some cream cheese and syrup on top it makes it *really* good!' My suggestion drew no response from Brother. 'I'm not trying to tell you what to do but it really does make the cornmeal taste better,' I continued. Finally, Brother Bhaktananda looked over at me and said, 'Thank you. Information is always accepted; whether or not it's acted upon is another matter.'" (Laughter)

Brother kept his life *very* simple; not just his outer life, but his spiritual life, too. He got down to the *essence* of the teachings. Simplicity frees you up for the pursuit of God. In simplicity is the profound.

Most of all, Brother realized it's about *practicing* the teachings. In reading the *Lessons*, whenever he came across something he could practice, he would put a "P" in the margin as a reminder to practice the teaching. Sometimes he would actually write it out on an index card and carry it around in his pocket for a week as a reminder to practice that particular teaching. Brother was very practical that way. "The mind is not for philosophy; it is for focus and practice," he said. He used his mind not to philosophize the teachings, but to deepen his practice.

Brother always emphasized the importance of spending time in the stillness. When restlessness came in meditation he would talk to his mind: "Be still ... go deeper ... relax." That is how you gain control of the mind and consciousness. He *used* the mind to *talk* to the mind and to *control* the mind. During the practice of Kriya he would talk to the mind to keep the mind in the spine.

A couple of weeks before his passing, two monks came to visit Brother. He was in bed at that time, and after they had talked for a little while he said, "Now it's time for a little rest" ... and just like that Brother was asleep. He could do that because he had perfected that complete and total control over his consciousness.

Brother gave his life to Master, and Master gave it to the devotees. He was tireless, and he gave himself fully in selfless service to helping others. During the day at some point he might put his head down on his desk for ten minutes or so. "If you can just touch the subconscious for ten minutes, then you can keep going," he would say. "That's all you need. Tell the mind to relax, be still. That is how you gain control of your mind and consciousness."

Brother gave us a tremendous example of getting control of the consciousness, which is so important, because then when we need to concentrate the mind on something we can do it. Brother said, "Whatever we apply our consciousness to, it becomes so." The manifesting power of concentration comes from centering the mind on one thing at a time. Remember this, and most of all, remember it during practice of Kriya.

Brother's simple approach to every aspect of life gave him a unique way of conveying the teachings in a simple, direct way. One time the monks were watching a fascinating movie entitled, "*The Universe*". Afterwards they started asking Brother questions about the film, and one of them asked, "If the physical universe is so vast, how does this relate to Spirit?" Brother answered, "It's like a sponge in water; the sponge is in the water, and the water is in the sponge." It was such a great and *simple* explanation.

Brother always focused on the essentials of the teachings. He stressed that we should read and study Master's teachings regularly, especially the *Lessons*. "Read a few pages every day," he would say. "Leave the *Lessons* out on your desk opened, and then when you are walking by you will have them right there in front of you to study." This was the kind of very simple, practical advice Brother gave.

Brother was especially big on *Whispers from Eternity*, *Metaphysical Meditations*, and *Scientific Healing Affirmations*. In one letter of response to a lady devotee who had sought counseling on how to help her two grown children - a son with alcoholism and a daughter with depression - Brother gave very simple, straightforward, practical advice that both the son and daughter should read *Whispers from Eternity* and *Metaphysical Meditations*. These two writings of Master, Brother explained, would help to change the son's consciousness and put positive ideas in his mind, and would uplift the daughter and give her positive ideas to think about and make her happy if she would accept them sincerely.

Nowadays we hear about "cognitive therapy". What is it? Cognitive therapy is a kind of psychotherapy that promotes mental health by focusing on a person's thinking and how to reprogram their thinking. This is just what Master and Brother Bhaktananda were advising all these years! We can use Master's teachings to reprogram our thinking and to break bad habits, and this makes us more positive-thinking.

Brother had absolute evenmindedness; he was unflappable. Over the years he encountered all kinds of situations with all different kinds of people. Especially here in Hollywood, the "entertainment capital of the world", you get all kinds of "entertainment" coming through the gate. (Laughter) But Brother always came from that center of calmness he had attained.

Brother Ishtananda told us a story: One time he had just finished ushering a wedding ceremony at Hollywood Temple, and he sat down in front of the altar to meditate for a few minutes. Brother Bhaktananda was in an adjoining room filling out the paperwork for the marriage certificate. (Brother never had a secretary.) Suddenly this guy comes off the street into the Temple and grabs a lamp and starts bashing the picture of Christ on the altar!

Brother Bhaktananda, no doubt hearing the loud commotion going on from the adjoining room, quietly entered the Temple and calmly approached the young man.

"May I help you?" he said. (Laughter)

Looking at the picture of Jesus, the man sobbed, "He doesn't love me!!"

"Let's talk," Brother said, and he ushered the man into the minister's room.

Lovingly, but firmly, Brother told him, "You are upset and you need to calm down. First you get off drugs, then get a job, find a place to live, and then you start coming to services."

Just like that! Because Brother was in his calm center, he could do the right thing at the right time.

Brother Bhaktananda used to say, "We have to be casual about everything that happens to us during the day." Even in that extreme situation Brother didn't react, but just calmly offered his service to that young man ... "May I help you?" This was Brother's "Standard Operating System". In all kinds of circumstances in life he always remained calm and evenminded - and it was also how he was able to have deep meditations.

Christ said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The heart refers to the feelings - chitta - the heart's feelings. Yoga has to do with control of the feelings - likes and dislikes. Brother had achieved this pure tranquility of feeling. He was able to calmly observe this agitated, angry young man bashing the altar and say - "Okay, this is what's happening. What needs to be done here?" - but with no strong feeling of likes or dislikes about it; without any feelings about *how I'd like it to be*. When the heart is pure, the feelings are calm. Evenmindedness is a vital quality on the spiritual path. It's an essential quality in being able to deal with whatever happens during the day, and it also helps us to have deeper meditations.

Practicing the presence of God - Brother always brought everything back to this. He emphasized the importance of developing a personal relationship with God by practicing His presence. Then your state of consciousness is not always in a state of flux.

From the SRF Website in memoriam to Brother Bhaktananda (this was not in Brother Ishtananda's talk):

He often stated, "When we practice the presence of God by repeating a devotional thought consistently and sincerely, then joy starts to fill our hearts. Joy, or love, or peace - sometimes we experience one of these qualities, and sometimes all three at once. That personal relationship with God is so wonderful; unless you have felt it, you can't describe it. That feeling is just the beginning of what we experience in loving God. Divine love remains with us, growing and deepening, as long as we keep on with our practice of the Presence: 'I love Thee, Lord; I Love Thee, Lord - chanting it all the time.'"

Brother used to say, "Next to regular meditation, practicing the presence *from your heart* is the next important thing." And Brother gave us some tips on how to practice the presence:

1. Keep your mantra/chant to a very few words.
2. Use the same chant for a long time. Brother would use the same chant for years - one time he used the same chant for seven years straight.
3. Have an intensity about it. "You really have to kneel into it from time to time," Brother would say.
4. Chant from the heart. There has to be an element of love in the chant, not just mechanical repetition.

"From the earliest days of my time with him," Brother Ishtananda said, "I saw absolute selfless service. Brother was tireless. He had no concept of time for himself. There was practically never a time when Brother could even finish his lunch without some kind of interruption. Often times a phone call would come and he would always stop what he was doing to take the call. After a few months of seeing this happen, I answered the phone one day, and it was someone wanting to talk with him. Brother was eating his lunch, so I asked the person to call back later. When Brother found out what I'd done he gently chided me,

"I always take my calls." It was always about serving others; Brother never thought of himself.

Brother knew how to use time wisely. One time a few years ago a group of monks were in their quarters watching TV - it was the championship playoffs. Brother Bhaktananda happened to walk into the room and one of the monks invited Brother to join them. "No thanks," Brother declined. "I have better things to do." And he *did*. He didn't have time for that.

Brother always gave personalized attention to anyone in need. He actually took the time to compose personal affirmations for the devotees, some of them quite lengthy. When we have an attitude of selfless service, it helps us get away from the ego, and when the attention is off ourselves we will feel that divine joy. But if it's always about "I, me, and mine", it chokes off that divine joy. Brother's desire to do service for others was not just to fulfill a duty to Master, but it flowed from his genuine love for the devotees. He could see the Divine in all, and he came from a level of consciousness that wanted to free the Divine in that individual.

He gave Christ-love to everyone, and that Christ-love was evident even to the altar basher. "Can I help you?" - That was what Brother wanted to do. "Come live nearby and come to the Temple", he encouraged that angry young man. "Would *you* have invited the altar basher to come back? At the time, I don't think I would have," Brother Ishtananda admitted. Christ-love cannot be turned off and on; it has to be cultivated. "How can I help that soul? How can I serve him?" - That was always Brother's thought. As a result, others always wanted to do for Brother. He had a beautiful bond of friendship with so many people. How wonderful life can be when we live in service and fellowship with others. Be a giver, and you will always have friends when you live your outer life in that friendship - that "fellow feeling", as Master called it.

Brother was very enthusiastic about meditation and teaching meditation. He used to give a Satsanga for a beginner's meditation class, and he divided meditation into five parts:

1. An opening prayer
2. A chant or affirmation
3. Practice of the techniques of meditation
4. Spending time in the stillness. Brother emphasized to spend as much time as you can in the stillness.
5. Practice devotion. Talk to God when you can't hold the stillness any longer

He would teach that after the techniques we should sit a long time in the stillness. Relax the body, relax the mind, and relax the will. Concentrate the attention at the point between the eyebrows, using your will to keep just enough awareness there without straining. Then in that stillness, when you are completely relaxed, suddenly you will slip into the superconscious state.

The name "Bhaktananda" means "bliss through devotion" - not *emotion*, but devotion. "The greatest thing you can ask for is Love," Brother said. "Love is a quality, a feeling of the heart; devotion is the offering of that feeling of the heart to God. Every time you offer devotion to God you receive some measure of God contact - this is a law." And Master said, "Only love makes you one with God." Devotion - this is the quickest and easiest way.

Attunement with Master: Brother stressed this to the end of his life. One day after about a year in the ashram at Mount Washington, another monk came and told Brother, "Master wants to see you." Brother went to the room where Master was seated and took the dust of his feet. "God bless you," Master said, and then they talked for a bit about living the ashram life. Then Master said to him, "Always keep in tune with me."

Master wants all of us to always stay in tune with him. We can inwardly commune with Master, but it's not easy. The spiritual path is not for the lazy man. It takes self-discipline. Meditate and practice the presence of God by chanting "Om Guru, Om Guru," or "I love you Master, I love you Master," or similar chants, offering your love to Master - Master and God being one.

Through following these teachings we can attune with Master and his guidance. Through the years, as he continued to practice the presence, Brother said he was overjoyed to learn he was able to inwardly commune with Master. When you are attuned, you will always know what to do, because this attunement is how you get his guidance. Brother Bhaktananda was a perfect example of Master's teachings - he was "the real deal".

Brother was not apologetic about repeating the same things again and again. He would say, "I'm going to repeat the same things over and over until I see you practicing them." He did it so we would listen - so we would take his advice and *practice* it.

SRF has just released a new DVD of a talk that Brother gave at the 1993 Convocation. One of the nuns, Mukti Mata, said of him, "Some of the things Brother Bhaktananda said were so simple they were almost child-like, but they were all true." He lived Master's truths. His operating system was that divine consciousness; he was anchored in that consciousness.

From a letter of tribute to Brother Bhaktananda from Sri Daya Mata: (this was not in Brother Ishtananda's talk)

From the early years, I remember Brother Bhaktananda as one of Master's faithful monks who came to this path for God alone, and who took to heart his Guru's guidance and teachings. He entered the ashram in 1939, and in the 66 years since then, he never wavered in his dedication and service to his Guru. To the end of his days the thought of God and Master was uppermost in his consciousness, and his life

was proof of how powerful are the simple, practical principles of living and of seeking God that Guruji taught when they are applied wholeheartedly and with devotion. Brother Bhaktananda's calm, unassuming manner and sincere desire to help others made him approachable by the many devotees who came to him for counsel. And his way of simplicity, humility, and love for God inspired them to seek in their own lives that sweet relationship with the Divine.

It was his joy to do for Master's devotees, and he gave freely of his time and attention, without thought of self, whenever someone was in need. Nothing would give him greater happiness than to see all of you striving to follow Master with single-pointed dedication as he did, and to make God and Guru a real presence in your daily lives. Let us unite in remembering him with joy and gratitude, as we send our eternal love and friendship to his soul. By keeping in your hearts the qualities you admired most in him and resolving to manifest them in your lives, you will honor him and also that Divine One whose love comes to you through all sincere God-attuned souls.

Unceasing blessings,
Sri Daya Mata

The Second Coming of Christ: Exploring the Divine Consciousness Within You

Sunday Evening Lecture - Brother Chidananda

"Looking out at the audience I see such shining jewels gathered here in this hotel," Brother Chidananda said, "... and that's just the tip of the iceberg, because then there are all those devotees who couldn't come to Convocation but are at home, many of them timing their meditations with us. And then there are those radiant stars and suns - our Gurus who are here helping us."

Daya Ma is in constant meditation this week and is deeply aware and participating in this Convocation. Brother read a letter from Daya Mata to us.

Paraphrased excerpts from Ma's letter:

Know that I am joining you, praying for you, and sending my love. Guruji greeted each one with great love, and he is pouring out his blessings to each one of you. Renew your resolve to find God. Realize how much He cherishes you. Take Him in all you do. God is more real than all the experiences you have in this world. Every effort you make to spiritualize your life has great impact. Countless others, thousands will be uplifted by your work. Others will surely reap from your good thoughts added to the ether. In this time of unrest we must anchor ourselves in Him who is changeless. Ma urged us to keep our thinking positive and to participate in the Worldwide Prayer Circle. She reminded us to feel the special blessing of the Satsanga - the fellowship - here at Convocation.

"Another aspect of fellowship is baptism," Brother said, "and that is what I want to focus on tonight." Master says at the beginning of *The Second Coming*: "In titling this work *The Second Coming of Christ*, I am not referring to a literal return of Jesus to earth. He came two thousand years ago and, after imparting a universal path to God's kingdom, was crucified and resurrected; his reappearance to the masses now is not necessary for the fulfillment of his teachings. What *is* necessary is for the cosmic wisdom and divine perception of Jesus to speak again through each one's own experience and understanding of the infinite Christ Consciousness that was incarnate in Jesus. That will be his true Second Coming."

What can we do to experience the true Second Coming? There are two themes in *The Second Coming*: baptism and satsanga. This talk tonight is all about baptism - what it really means - and how Master unfolds this familiar term for us in *The Second Coming*, and unveils such depths of wisdom and beauty - because he turns it into *experience* - the experience of that baptism of the divine consciousness that flows to the disciple when the disciple is in tune with a Christ-like Guru.

The new video we are showing this week, *Master's "Return to India 1935 - 1936"*, shows the Guru baptizing Richard Wright, (Guruji's disciple and brother of Sri Daya Mata, who traveled with Master to India and served as his secretary during this time.) The baptism Guruji is giving *you* this week is every bit as real and powerful. Feel that he is giving you the keys to the kingdom of heaven - because he is.

Master wrote in *The Second Coming*: "One who comes near a holy person will be benefited; this is baptism by spiritual magnetism. The saint's thoughts and magnetic aura cast out a

vibratory glow that changes the consciousness and brain cells of those who come within range. All who visit or live on the same grounds where a master lives or has lived will automatically be transformed if they are in tune."

Baptism is a familiar Western term, but it has a much deeper meaning than most people realize. In the West, we think of getting baptized by being immersed in water or having water sprinkled on us - this is the outer symbolic ceremony. Master said, "While baptism by water as a sacred rite has its valid points, including the temporary cleansing of the mind, the ceremony, to be of lasting value, must be followed up with continued lessons in spiritual living and God-contact. It is the mental attitude of faith and devotion in which one receives a ceremonial baptism - whether by immersion or the modified symbolic way of sprinkling water on the head - that determines the blessings received; and it is the continuity of right thought and action that assures the lasting benefit. The initiate thereafter should regularly baptize the self with Spirit by immersion of the consciousness in the wisdom, magnetism, and spiritual radiation of the Holy Ghost in meditation."

This is a good description of the Convocation experience. But what about when we go home? You want to take it with you. That's what *The Second Coming* is all about.

Brother Chidananda worked with Daya Mata and Mrinalini Mata for seven years to pull together all of Master's manuscripts for *The Second Coming*. Brother told us, "You may wonder what that experience was like. In one word: baptism." The more you absorb your mind in the words of the Guru, the more you will *feel* that vibration of his presence, and *that* is the baptism of his consciousness. It's *not* just a book. At last year's Convocation we weren't celebrating just the release of the book, but introducing a new source of spiritual power - a dynamo of one who truly knew God.

Study of holy teachings is a form of meditation, and meditation becomes a form of baptism. It's like what Master said: "The saint's thoughts and magnetic aura cast out a vibratory glow that changes the consciousness and brain cells of those who come within range."

The *Gita*, the *Lessons* - all of Master's writings are charged with that divine consciousness. All his writings are imbued with that divine Christ Consciousness, Krishna Consciousness. All of his words are a source of spiritual power. One Vedic scholar said of Master's *Gita*, "Yogananda appears as a sage of the highest order and a spiritual scientist, an avatar of yoga for the coming world civilization."

"When I am gone the teachings will be the guru," Master said. "You will be in tune with me and those Great Ones who sent me. You are not connected to a printing press, but you are connected directly with God through the great link of the living Masters."

Some of you may remember Brother Mokshananda - he was the last monastic to enter the ashram before Master's mahasamadhi, just a few days before Guruji left the body. The first time he saw Master in person, Guruji greeted him and told him, "Loyalty is the highest law." By that he meant, "You applied that law of loyalty and it brought you back to me."

During Brother Mokshananda's final illness some years ago, he was confined to a wheelchair, and Brother Chidananda was one of those who helped take care of him. Brother Chidananda spoke of one scene at Mother Center on Christmas Day in 1981 when Daya Ma had asked some of the monks to bring Brother Mokshananda to Master's shrine upstairs. Just as they came out of the elevator and entered the 3rd floor hallway, Daya Ma came out of a room and entered the hall. All at once, all of them felt this tremendous wave like a ball of light and love rolling down the hall and surrounding them.

They were joined in Master's shrine by some of the other senior monastics to honor Brother Mokshananda for his life of devotion, loyalty, love, and service. Later on Brother Anandamoy said that the presence of Master was so strong that it was almost overpowering, the whole room being filled with this tremendous love.

That is the Christ Consciousness. It's that overwhelming love which pervades all creation, channeled perfectly through a God-knowing Master. How can we make that consciousness more real in our lives? The growth that takes place - the maturing, the realization - comes in stages.

During the first stage, Christ Consciousness appears outside. It appears external to us - in our Guru, in the Guru's teachings - and that is a tremendous blessing, to be drawn to a Christ-like Guru. Most people in the world are not even to the point where they are *seeking* that.

In the second stage, that outer relationship with its blessings and inspiration is taken away, and this happens in many ways: the Guru leaves the body, the devotee moves away, Convocation ends and we go home. But there's something tremendous we need to learn in this stage. It takes a while to learn the lesson - that we have to learn to take that relationship *inside* - that without getting beyond that outer dependence there is always a lack and there's still a lesson to learn.

During the last years of his life, Master spent much time in seclusion. He began to withdraw from the world in order to concentrate on his writings, and he no longer spoke at the Temples. As a result, half of the audience was gone. They left because they were so dependent on the outer contact. But then after a while many of them came back and Master was *so* glad. "At last they got the lesson!" he said. "It's not about the outer contact."

It was the same with Jesus going to the crucifixion. The grief when the Guru leaves is great. As a disciple, can you imagine how difficult it must have been to deal with the end of that outer manifestation and to find the way to that *inner* attunement? But they *had* to learn how to make the connection internal - and they *did* learn. Ultimately, our connection to the Guru is not dependent upon anything external.

Gyanamata wrote a note to one of the nuns about the day that Master left Mt. Washington to begin his trip to India: "Standing and watching you, feeling what you were feeling as

Master drove away - you didn't know if he'd come back, and I so much wanted to comfort you, but I knew if I did I would break down." Imagine what all the disciples must have been feeling, not knowing if Guruji would ever come back.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." Jesus was saying, "It's for your benefit that I will be leaving, because otherwise you won't make the effort to go within."

And Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

In *The Second Coming*, Master wrote about this Bible passage: "Try to imagine the love spoken of by Jesus in these verses. To feel that soul-love of all pure hearts is to be transported in an ecstasy of joy so great, so overwhelming, that it cannot be contained - a charge of bliss passing through one's being, a thousand million volts of rapturous power. This divine emotion is beyond description - a communion of unutterable sweetness with the Infinite Grace, the Indescribable Glory, the Eternal Protection. That is the love of God which Jesus felt, and in which he sheltered his disciples: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love."

"The Gospel preserves a record of Jesus' words on this holy occasion; but readers should realize - and try to feel within themselves as though they, too, were present - that behind those words was the tangible vibratory presence of God. During times of divine fellowship (satsanga) such as Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, those who are receptive feel transported into a higher consciousness of God-perception pouring into their hearts and minds as the master speaks. This attunement imbues the devotee's consciousness, in the highest way, whenever he summons the guru's grace in the inner temple of deep, worshipful meditation."

How can we move from outer dependence to this inner attunement? By practice of the techniques. Practice the techniques faithfully, because without them we don't have that inner contact with the Guru. A very important part of Convocation is meditating together and the technique review classes.

Master said, "Become the Ocean of light, Ocean of dream, Ocean of joy, Ocean of Om. Follow the technique; transfer your consciousness to the spine; live in that eternal space. Become a spiritual alcoholic, drunk with the joy of God, as the disciples of Christ. They were like drunken men filled with new wine - that was the joy of Holy Ghost. Jesus promised to send the Comforter - the joy of that great vibration. Self-Realization has come into this land - no more mockery of Christianity! - but to send that unfulfilled promise; experience of Holy Ghost, the great joy, when as you shall see, as I am seeing in reality. I am in that Holy Ghost. I am talking from that sphere - not from the body. So shall you say I have told you the truth, if you practice the techniques."

This is the third stage of growth and realization. This is the baptism, the inner communion, the vibration, the contact with the Divine that comes with practice of the techniques.

"The greatest experience in editing *The Second Coming* is that you come to a point where you hear the Guru's voice talking to you," Brother said. "It's not just about words, for 'behind the words is the great vibratory presence of God,' as Master said. Words work on the mind; but deeper than facts, is truth. When you *feel* that truth - *that* feeling is the baptism of the Guru; it is the vibration of his consciousness. This is an experience all of us can share. It's taking it from the realm of theory to something we can practice. If you can really learn how to listen, you can get into that divine consciousness. This is an exercise in listening. What strikes me as most meaningful are the words of Jesus when he said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' - because that's just what Master said."

Master's great disciple, Rajarsi Janakananda, advanced very quickly spiritually, and Master said, "It's because he knows how to listen." It's not so important how much of Master's writings we read, but how well we have listened to them. *The Second Coming* is not just a book. Take a little bit - a few words, a few sentences - and listen. *Feel* that vibration of Master's words washing over you.

There used to be a restaurant on the grounds at Encinitas, and Rajarsi was present on the day that Master held the dedication for the restaurant. Guruji had assigned Brother Bimalananda to watch over Rajarsi during the ceremony. Just as Master began a prayer - he got no further than, "Heavenly Father, Divine Mother, Friend," - when Rajarsi fell off his chair. Not realizing what had happened, Brother Bimalananda thought, "Oh the poor man, he must have fainted!" (Laughter) But Rajarsi had gone into samadhi just by hearing those few words of Master's prayer. Now, *that's* someone who knows how to listen!! (Laughter)

The Second Coming of Christ is an exercise in listening. It's not about how many pages you read. Take a few words just like Rajarsi did, and absorb, listen, contact. You will get the whole message if you read a few words and *really* listen to them. You will get the full meaning - and *that* is baptism.

Brother Chidananda asked us all to close our eyes, center our attention at the Christ Center, and think of the concept of God closest to our hearts. It may be Christ, Father, Mother, Master, Divine Love, Peace, and so on. Then Brother slowly read Chapter IX, Verse 34 from the Gita and we meditated on those words for a few moments:

"On Me fix thy mind, be thou My devotee, with ceaseless worship bow reverently before Me. Having thus united thyself to Me as thy Highest Goal, thou shalt be Mine own."

God is saying, "It doesn't matter if you have been successful, as long as you've made *Me* your goal." Remember the story in the Bible about the prodigal son who had journeyed to a far country and had squandered the wealth his father had given him? He agonized that his father would never take him back. Those words in the Bible are so touching, that even when the son was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran to greet him. And the father called for the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and brought forth the fatted calf to celebrate the return of his son who was lost, and now is found.

That is just what *God* and *Guru* are saying to us.

God and *Guru* are saying, "Run to *Me*. Glue yourself to *Me*. Just make *Me* your goal. Just turn toward *Me* and make *Me* your goal and you will be *Mine*."

He is pulling us to His consciousness. Think of *God* as being in the Christ Center, and that He is projecting these thoughts to you. *That's* how we convert book reading into meditation - and it becomes a baptism. Let that consciousness of the *Guru* baptize you. *God* doesn't talk directly to you in the beginning, but he does talk to you personally through the *Guru*.

Think, "He came for me. *God* is talking to me through the *Guru's* words." The *Guru's* words are helping to make you more desirous of being with *God*. Hold onto these thoughts, and practice the techniques of meditation. Our *Guru* is the Avatar of Yoga for the coming world civilization.

Monday Afternoon Satsanga

Brother Ishtananda

Q. We often hear about "sitting in the stillness" in meditation. What does "stillness" mean?

A. One time the monks met with Sri Daya Mata for a meditation and satsanga. Ma spoke about stillness and described it as a state in which "the consciousness is very alert but there are no restless thoughts falling on the lake of the mind." Brother Anandamoy describes stillness this way: "There is conscious awareness and a deeply alert state without thoughts." Dr. Lewis said, "To commune with God you can't think about it. You must rise above thought." Brother Bhaktananda described stillness as "just being absorbed in the feeling of God's presence at the spiritual eye. There is no thought, no prayer, no chanting - only peace, joy, and love."

Stillness is the key to the spiritual path, and the goal of spirituality is communion with God. In every age those who succeeded in establishing communion with God were those who found entry into that inner silence.

Q. In meditation, what should we do after we practice the techniques?

A. First we must understand *why* we practice the techniques. Ultimately it is to commune with God. But the immediate goal is to concentrate the mind to achieve a deeply alert state without thoughts. Focus the mind and practice the techniques with ever-increasing attention and ever deeper concentration. Concentrate on the breath with Hong-Sau, the inner sounds with the Aum technique, and the currents in the spine with Kriya.

Master said, "When the activating power of the mind is stilled by concentration, restlessness ceases and we become absorbed in the transcendental Bliss of the soul." The bliss *is* there, but we don't experience it because of the restless mind. You may experience some peace - and that is good - but peace is not enough. We must go deeper into the stillness to experience the other aspects of God. In that stillness the perception of the other aspects of God will eventually come.

Guruji said, "After practice of the techniques, just be gently aware at the spiritual eye." Notice that Master said to be "gently aware". The word "gently" is so important, because in order to keep the attention there at the Christ Center we have to use our will, but Master says to just use the will gently - not too much, or it becomes forcing, straining. You can't force your way into the stillness. As regards straining - don't do it. Don't strain for results because it will block intuition from flowing. Strain and force never work. Be relaxed and patient.

Woody Allen's description of life is a perfect description of being in the stillness: "Life is 80% showing up, and 20% just being there." (Laughter) After the techniques, just show up and be there. Be aware - that's all we have to do. It sounds simple, but it's not easy because the mind likes to stay busy. The mind tells us, "You are wasting your time. You have places to go and people to see. What are you doing just sitting there?" (Laughter) We are human *beings*, but our minds want us to be "human *doings*". (Laughter)

Q. What should I do if I get to the stillness and then it fails and my mind wanders? I want to talk with God but my mind wanders.

A. "When the mind starts to wander, *talk* to the mind," Brother Bhaktananda said. Tell it, "Be still. Relax, relax. Go deeper." This is controlling the mind with the mind. Brother Bhaktananda used to say to himself, "Not this, Lord, not this. I want Thee." When the mind wanders to other thoughts, usually you will find that it has wandered away from the spiritual eye and your eyes are focused downward. Put the attention back on the spiritual eye. Try knitting the eyebrows for a moment and bring the attention back to focus gently at the Christ Center. You will eventually build up a liking for being in the stillness. If the mind is still not settling down, go back to the techniques or practice devotion by talking to God in the language of your heart.

Q. What if I don't achieve any stillness at all?

A. Don't blame yourself. Don't think, "Oh, I'm not practicing the techniques good enough." This is what is called "DGS". Many devotees suffer from it. What is DGS? - "Devotee Guilt Syndrome". It's when you mentally beat yourself up: "I'm the worst devotee in the whole world. How could Master love me?" DGS is very pervasive and it's *painful*. "I just want to tell you one thing about this," Brother Ishtananda warned, "*Knock it off!!!*" (Laughter) "*Don't do it!!!* Don't create more suffering for yourself."

Brother said he was told by a senior monk that when discussing the subject of stillness with devotees to use caution in not inadvertently causing DGS. Stillness is the key, but it is a very lofty state. In that stillness we are very close, and possibly *in* a portion of God-consciousness. If the monastics overly stress getting into the stillness and the devotees aren't achieving that state, they may become discouraged. But then again, there are many spiritually mature devotees who want to go deeper, and so the monastics need to talk about how to achieve this state of stillness. Yes, God is the ultimate goal, but the immediate goal is to get to that stillness. So have right attitude. If you can't be in that stillness very long - fine. Don't get discouraged. Don't think, "Oh, I've failed. I missed the opportunity." Master said that we will *all* have those times. When your whole consciousness is yearning for God - that *is* being with God. So just make the loving effort to be with God. That's what counts - and even the *desire* for God brings a measure of God-contact.

Q. Master teaches us to sit in the stillness, and then afterwards to practice devotion. But what if there is no time left to practice devotion, or what if I just want to spend the whole time sitting in the stillness? Is this okay?

A. There are five parts to meditation: prayer, chanting, techniques, stillness, devotion. After sitting in the stillness - when you can't hold it any longer - *then* practice devotion. There are no hard and fast rules. Don't be rigid. It's not, "Okay, there are five parts to meditation, and if I practice all five then I've fulfilled the contract." It's not a business deal with God. (Laughter) There should be devotion throughout the five parts. There has to be that element of love for God in it; otherwise it's just mechanical and sterile. Master said, "There is a personal element in the search for God that is more important than mastery over the whole science of Yoga."

Is it okay to spend the whole time in stillness? There is no clear line between stillness and devotion. Regarding the difference between love and devotion, Brother Bhaktananda said, "Love is the feeling of the heart; devotion is the expression of that feeling of love to the

Divine." But there can be a feeling of love without any expression of it - and that state is just *being* in that love.

One saint put it this way: "As long as the bee is outside the petals of the lily, it buzzes and emits sounds. But when it is inside the flower, the sweetness hath silenced the bee. It drinks the nectar and forgets sounds and forgets itself. So with the man of devotion."

When you are in love with someone, would you rather just *be* with that person, or would you rather write him a letter? In devotion you *tell* Him. In the stillness you are *with* Him.

There is no need to talk to God all the time about "me, me, me" - in other words, talking to God about "my needs, my wants, my problems, my desires." Yes, it is good to pour out your heart to God and to talk to Him about these things, but the more you are *with* God, the less talking there is. The sweetness silences the mind and there is no need to express it.

Do you recall the gentleman by the name of Leo Cox who was interviewed for the film, "Glimpses of a Life Divine"? Leo lived in the Phoenix ashram, and each time he came to visit Master, he always had all kinds of questions he wanted to ask. But once he was in Master's presence he felt so good that all those questions would leave him, and so when Master would ask, "Do you have any questions you want to ask me?" Leo would always say, "Oh, no sir, I'm just so happy to be here."

Finally Master told him, "You write down your questions and next time you come to visit you bring the list with you." Leo dutifully followed Master's instructions, and next time he came for a visit he had that list of questions in his coat pocket to be sure he wouldn't forget them. But when Master asked him, "Do you have any questions you want to ask me?", once again Leo forgot all about his questions and problems and answered, "Oh, no sir, I'm just so happy to be here." (Laughter)

"Yes you do, they are in your coat pocket," Master said. "Now you take that list out of your pocket and ask me your questions."

This is a beautiful analogy of being in the stillness: there are no questions because we are "just so happy to be here."

An Indian Swami once said, "When you are with someone you love very much, you can talk, and it's pleasant, but the reality is not in the conversation. It is simply being together. Meditation is the highest form of prayer. In it you are so close to God that you don't need to say a thing - it is just great to be together."

It is fine if you feel you want to continue sitting in the stillness instead of practicing devotion. You don't have to *talk* with God to *be* with God. It boils down to having that natural loving relationship with God. You will know what you feel and you will intuitively know what you need. There is a spontaneous relationship with God and you just can't compartmentalize that relationship.

Q. I want to love God but I feel no sense of love for Him. I have no feeling for Him other than marveling at what a weird sense of humor He has. (Laughter)

A. "One time there was a lady devotee who came to me for counseling," Brother said. "Tearfully she told me of the difficulties she was having, and her feeling that God seemed so distant and unconcerned for what she was going through. 'I don't even know what God is,' she lamented. The only comfort she got was practicing Kriya and talking to Master. I told her, "Forget about God and concentrate on Master!" Immediately I could see her relax, and she dried her eyes and said, "Really?" "Yes," I assured her, "The Guru is God, and God is the Guru."

A great sage in India from a higher age said, "If you cannot think of the Absolute, then think of the form of an avatar." How many of us can conceive of the Ultimate Absolute? There is a quote in the second chapter of *The Holy Science* where Sri Yukteswar describes the goal of yoga. In Sanskrit it is called *kaivalya*, which means liberation, oneness with God. Sri Yukteswar wrote, "This unification of Self with God is *Kaivalya*, which is the Ultimate object of all created beings."

"Some time before I took my final vows," Brother told us, "I read that very same quote by Sri Yukteswar and thought to myself, 'Boy, "Kaivalya" - *that's* what I want to take for my monastic name! I'll be Brother Kaivalyananda. Years went by, and then in 1991 I was assigned to go to India. At that time my name was Bramachari Robert. But when the monastics go to India they take a Sanskrit name, so I thought, "Here is my chance to take the name 'Kaivalyananda'."

Now, when we take a Sanskrit name we have to get permission. So I asked Brother Anandamoy about it and told me, 'No, that's not a good name for you.' I was crestfallen. Then one of the monks gave me a book entitled, '1001 Sanskrit Names' and I thought, 'Well, I'll look for names that have the same meaning as "Kaivalya".'

I found another name with a similar meaning and came back to Brother Anandamoy. "How about Brother A_____?" I asked. "No, that's not a good name for you," he said. (Laughter) Then he told me, "Why don't you choose three names and let Daya Mata decide for you." So, I went back to the '1001 Sanskrit Names' and found three more names that had similar meanings to Kaivalya, and sent them to Ma. Out of those three, Daya Ma chose M_____, and so I thought I finally had my name.

Then just two days before I was to leave for India I got a phone call: "The Board of Directors has decided that M_____ is not a good name for you. Can you come up with something else?" (Laughter)

So, once again, out came the '1001 Sanskrit Names'... (Laughter) I chose another name which was also duly turned down by the Board of Directors. I picked yet another name, but that one was turned down, too. Then in the book I saw "ishta", which means "object of worship", such as a statue or image.

"How about Ishtananda?" I inquired.

"Oh! That would be a *good* name for Robert!" Mrinalini Mata said.

Brother confided to us, "At the time, I was thinking, 'So, here it's come to this ... all the way from the Ultimate Absolute down to some little item on the altar!'" (Much Laughter)

Brother told us, "I shared this story with you because most of us can't deal with the Absolute. We *need* an "ishta" - an object of worship - an aspect of the Divine that we can have a relationship with. Our relationship with God can't be just an intellectual concept - there must be *love* there. The personal aspect may feel limiting to some. But Master said, "If the devotee's ishta is Krishna or Christ, for example, the Lord will assume that concept. All such aspects are in no manner a limitation of God to that form, but are rather like windows opening to the Infinite Spirit."

"Later when I was taking my final vows, I was told that I could keep the name Ishtananda or come up with another name. But by that time I had realized the deeper aspects of that name and wanted to keep the name. "Ishtananda" means 'bliss through worship of the Beloved'," Daya Ma said.

Q. Master said that finding God is 25% the disciple's effort, 25% the guru's blessing, and 50% is the grace of God. Please explain God's "grace", and why it is so important.

A. Stillness provides the proper environment for us to receive the "grace" of God. Webster's dictionary defines "grace" as "divine influence acting in man to make him pure and strong".

"In the stillness, God works within you," Brother Anandamoy said. We may not be aware of those high and very subtle vibrations of the Divine working within us, but in the stillness those vibrations change our consciousness.

A saint said, "It's like a small child being carried in his mother's arms - crying, kicking his feet, wanting to go by himself. This only slows the mother down. If the child would just relax in his mother's arms they could make progress much quicker. The soul may not be aware, but it is achieving more than if it was walking on its own feet. It may well be unaware of any movement, as the senses cannot grasp the work that God is doing for the soul."

Brother Lawrence said, "The greater perfection a soul aspires after, the more dependent it is upon Divine grace."

Brother Anandamoy said, "There are different stages of stillness. The first stage is through the result of the techniques of meditation. Then comes the second, deeper dimension of stillness which comes through the grace of God. But this second stage does not come unless we make the effort."

Master said, "Of the total requirement to achieve salvation, it is said that 25% is the disciple's spiritual effort, 25% is the blessing of the guru, and the remaining 50% is the grace of God. The aspirant should not be tempted into complacency, however, waiting to be moved by the spirit of the blessings and grace, for *it is the catalyst of the devotee's effort that makes the formula work.*"

The effort makes us receptive - it shows God and Guru that we want their blessing and grace - it opens us up to their help. That blessing and grace is always there, but we can't receive it without the effort.

Another definition of "grace" in Webster's dictionary is, "unmerited love and favor of God toward man". Karmically, we may not deserve that love of God, but the beautiful thing is that grace transcends the karmic law! It's a very good deal! (Laughter) But you must make the effort to receive that grace. One devotee put it well when he said, "I'm in the efforts department. Master is in the results department."

Another aspect of stillness is being aware of it during the day. Can we experience the state of meditation when active? There are degrees of stillness, just like a lamp with a dimmer switch. It can be turned up high, or way down low, but in both cases we are aware of light. During the day it's on low; it's dimmed down. We are in the world and have to focus on our tasks. But we *can* be aware of God in daily life. When you have a moment now and again, there are techniques you can use throughout the day so that you will not be so totally immersed in the world:

- Brother Bhaktananda always advised us to mentally chant from the heart during the day.
- Brother Lawrence wrote, "In the world there is nothing more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God to keep the Divine awareness."
- Master always advised us to keep the attention at the point between the eyebrows. When Daya Mata went to Master with problems, inevitably he always pointed to the Christ Center and told her, "Just keep your mind here."
- Keep your consciousness throughout the day somewhat practicing the presence. It keeps us from being so totally immersed in the world. Then when we go back to meditate there hasn't been that much distance, and then in meditation it is easier to return to that inner state. Yes, we do have to focus on our responsibilities, but there are times and opportunities - eating a meal, riding in the car, in a waiting room - there are always opportunities to practice the presence. Find something that works. Daya Ma said, "In the beginning of practicing the presence we are *thinking*, but as we go deeper it becomes a *feeling*. Eventually it becomes a *state of consciousness*." Then the lamp is full and bright all the time.

Q. This world seems to be going crazy. Is there any hope for us?

A. Of tremendous help is creating the habit of evenmindedness. A British author and satirist wrote, "There is a theory which states that if ever anyone discovers what the universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. There is another theory which states that this has already happened." (Laughter)

Yes, we need to be spiritual realists. Uma Mata expressed it well when she said, "This world is not user friendly." (Laughter) Most people are interested in the world and want to know all about it. They follow the newspapers, TV, the Internet, etc. "But I need to know what's going on in the world," people say. Yes, we have to be practical.

But something else happens as we gather that information: there is judgment. "Oh, this is so horrible," we say. "I love this. That's evil. This is great. That's terrible." ... constant judgment. In judgment, where are we coming from? We are coming from our *feeling*, and Master says *it is our feeling that ties us to this world*.

Patanjali, the renowned sage of yoga science, begins his *Yoga Sutras* by declaring: "Yoga chitta vritti nirodha", which translated means, "Yoga (scientific union with God) is the neutralization of the waves of chitta (the inner 'heart' or power of feeling). It is the heart, or chitta - the feeling aspect of man's consciousness - that has to be controlled in order to attain God-realization.

Master writes in *The Second Coming*, "Experiences invading the mind do not create disturbance of restlessness until the heart, or feeling, is touched. If all experiences remained within an individual as academical knowledge, they could not hurt or bind him. It is the heart, with its duality, that becomes intimate with all experiences by having feelings of attraction or repulsion for them. If an individual observed his life's experiences as one unaffectedly watches motion pictures, he would go from this earth a free master."

Don't get overemotional, because in meditation you can't shut the world out once the feelings are involved. We need pureness of heart, which means having evenmindedness - no strong likes and dislikes. But we can't be pure in heart without following the teachings of the Masters and the spiritual laws - the Ten Commandments, yama/niyama. This is the reason we have moral codes. No matter how crazy the world gets, we should set our own standards based on Master's spiritual teachings. Then we can remain evenminded so that when we sit to meditate we can commune with God.

A wise Jewish Rabbi once said, "Do not grope in the darkness of the times." Remain in the spiritual light of God. One of Master's chants is, "Thee I find beyond the fringe of my mind." That's where you find the Absolute Contentment - beyond the fringe of your mind. Try to spend some time in the stillness, even in a short meditation. Have an ishta, some aspect of God you can relate to - an ishta that you can love, so that it's not mechanical or sterile - a love that draws you into the stillness. Daya Ma once said, "God gave us a means of escape very few know anything about." That escape is getting to that stillness.

Faith: A Cornerstone of Spiritual Living

Monday Evening Lecture - Brother Anilananda

Brother Anilananda asked us to close our eyes and take a moment of silence to feel the blessings of *God* and *Guru*. During the day think, "I can just take a few moments to be with *God*." It can be that quick. You don't need an hour - just a minute or even thirty seconds. To develop faith - *be faithful* - even in the short meditations.

Brother told us, "One time *Daya Ma* came to the Encinitas hermitage. She could see that the ashram was a very busy place with much more commotion going on than when she had lived there in *Master's* time. As it happened, I was very busy and hadn't been able to have my regular 30 minute noon meditation. *Ma* called the monastics together and asked us, 'Are

you satisfied with your spiritual life?' I told Ma that I had pronounced in my room for thirty seconds and was overwhelmed. She seemed satisfied with my answer."

If we can be faithful even in just a little bit of regularity then something wonderful will happen - you will be developing a direct, perceptible relationship with God. But in the beginning there may be no perception at all - you may not even believe what I'm saying!

There was a German man who, even from childhood was interested in what was really real. He became a physicist, and eventually came to live in the US. Then one time he came to an SRF retreat in Montreal and introduced himself to one of the monastics there.

"I don't believe in anything," the man said. "I'm a pure scientist. I don't believe in anything, but can I still study your teachings?"

"That's a great starting point!" the monk answered. (Laughter) "Paramahansa Yogananda taught us to take nothing for granted on emotion or blind faith; all that is required is an earnest spirit of inquiry."

"I studied all that mankind knows about science," the man said. "I experimented extensively in my field of scientific expertise, but I still don't know what reality is. Do you have any experiments I can do?" (Much laughter)

"Oh! That's a perfect question!" the monk answered. (More laughter)

Sri Yukteswar said that faith is *inherent* in us. We have intuitive faith. Master said, "Faith is latent in the soul but needs to be uncovered and cultivated." It's latent in the soul. But what is the soul?

One time SRF had a Sunday school teacher's meeting, and one speaker gave a demonstration on how to use sock puppets in the classroom. She put a sock over one hand that had glued on eyes and nose, and a mouth that was formed by the fingers and thumb moving apart and together. It was a great visual demonstration for children, to show that it was the teacher who was the life in the puppet animating the "soul" of the sock. A good question to ask the children would be, "What about *our* eyes, nose, and mouth? What is animating *us*? Who are we? What are we?"

Master said, "You say 'I, I, I', morning, noon, and night, but who *are* you? Only God exists, and you are but his expression." Behind human consciousness is soul consciousness, and behind that is Christ Consciousness, and beyond that is Cosmic Consciousness - the only thing that exists. So that Cosmic Consciousness, which is the only reality, has become smaller and smaller; it has come down into the spine and brain and now it's looking at all of you through human consciousness. (Laughter) We are this little dot of human consciousness, but it goes all the way back to God - to this tremendous Cosmic Consciousness which is latent, hidden underneath.

Faith is latent there too, in everybody. Master said, "Even ignorance-blinded individuals possess some degree of faith: a latent intuition of God's presence and power within that gives birth to all human hopes and incentive to achieve. This unconscious faith is the secret fountainhead of man's expectations of fulfillment of his copious dreams. Human hope, if used rightly as motivation to cultivate higher potentials of mind, imagination, and will, ultimately produces true faith, the intuitive realization of the divine powers in the soul."

That German scientist wanted to find what was really real because there was this *hope*. Keep on hoping! Realize that it is latent within all of us. There's a tremendous consciousness within us. Keep on hoping! It's a practical way to develop faith. Keep on hoping.

Positive thinking is the way to accomplish our hopes. Positive thinking makes use of how the universe came into being! In making the creation, the Absolute began to muse with a subtle vibration of thought. Then It vibrated that thought more strongly until it became astral light. The final step was when It vibrated even more grossly and became subatomic particles, virtual particles, atoms, etc. So thought is very powerful! At some point we begin to realize, "If I use my thought properly I can create!"

Daya Ma said, "Positive thinking and faith are the same thing." So start with hope and positive thinking. Master said, "Each thought creates according to its own nature. Success is hastened or delayed by one's habits. It is not your passing inspirations or brilliant ideas so much as your every day mental habits that control your life. When the thoughts are brought under control, they become veritable miracle workers."

There was an experiment done by researchers that clearly demonstrates how thinking rewires the brain. (Brother explained this experiment in his own words; the following is a more detailed reference to this study from the Internet):

Can the mind itself change the brain? Can mere thinking do it? Dr. Pascual-Leone, now at Harvard University, provided a preliminary answer, with an experiment. He had one group of volunteers practice a five-finger piano exercise, and a comparable group merely think about practicing it. This second group focused on each finger movement in turn, essentially playing the simple piece in their heads, one note at a time.

Actual physical practice produced changes in each volunteer's motor cortex, as expected. But so did mere mental rehearsal - in fact, as big a change as the physical practice. Like actual movement, imagined movements change the cortex. Merely thinking about moving produces brain changes comparable to those triggered by actually moving.

The existence, and importance, of brain plasticity are no longer in doubt. The brain is dynamic, and the life we lead leaves its mark in the complex circuitry of the brain — footprints of the experiences we have had, the thoughts we have thought, the actions we have taken. The brain allocates neural real estate depending on what we use most: the thumb of a videogame addict, the index finger of a Braille reader, the analytic ability of a chess player, the language skills of a linguist.

But the brain also remakes itself based on something much more ephemeral than what we do: It rewires itself based on what we think. This will be the next frontier for neuroplasticity, harnessing the transforming power of the mind to reshape the brain.

"Remember, God wants to hear that we are developing a personal relationship - that we are remembering our relationship with Him," Master said. God plays with us also. Brother Anilananda told us a story: "In 1972 I went to India for four years. After four months in the ashram at Ranchi, another devotee came from the U.S. to visit. Some of the monks decided to take him on an outing in the forest. One of the monks packed a picnic lunch, and after we all hiked into the forest for a while, we decided to split up for individual meditations and then to meet up again afterward for lunch. I was late getting back for lunch, and by the time I rejoined the group they were already eating. 'Oh, you missed the best part,' the visiting devotee said. 'Swiss cheese sandwiches!'"

I went into a kind of state of shock! (Laughter) I knew that there was probably no Swiss cheese around for hundreds of miles, but this was real shock. The devotee saw the look on my face and was horrified. "It was just a joke!! I'm so sorry!" he told me.

"Eventually I got over it," Brother said smilingly. "Then a few months later I was alone at the ashram when a lady arrived with a big package. "I just came from Nepal," she said. "They have wonderful dairies there, and I brought this for you." Now I knew that she meant it was for all of us in the ashram, but I was the only one there. I opened the package, and there was the biggest hunk of cheese I've ever seen! (Laughter) Talk about developing a relationship!! (Laughter) I was embarrassed, and I felt like Guruji was there admonishing me, "Do you think if I want you to have cheese that I can't give it to you?" (Laughter) "I want to hear you are remembering this relationship we have!"

Master said, "Most men consider the course of events as natural and inevitable. They little know what radical changes are possible through prayer. Prayer transcends law and then God can intervene. Faith is an antenna that is reaching out to God."

Brother told us, "During the years of 1975-76 while I was in Ranchi I was given the responsibility of looking after the dairy there."

We all burst out laughing and Brother looked a bit stumped until he suddenly realized *why* we were laughing. "Oh, I just realized the connection!" he exclaimed. "God was playing with me then too, so I could get it from you when you all laughed!" (Much laughter)

"The cows did not have anything green to eat, only straw, so I was given a plot of land to grow corn for them. But the land was a high spot and I needed to get water to it. I prayed for sprinklers, but ended up dragging a hose, and the corn grew very short. Now, Master said that if there is something we need that is not in the universe, God will create it for us. And wouldn't you know, just about at that time was when irrigation first became available in that area. I was their first customer!" (Laughter)

The relationship with God can be fun, but there are also hard parts. Life has its ups and downs. "We will be brought to our knees in devotion or in desperation," Master said. Relationships, job, finances, health - everything can collapse all at once. When you think about it, the enormity of what we go through is awesome, and there can be seemingly

impossible situations. In the Mahabharata you read about what those people in that time went through - the enormous suffering. And then you wonder, which was greater? - their suffering or our own suffering in this age? Really, they are comparable. When it's not fun - remember - it's a wonderful opportunity to grow this relationship with God. Oftentimes the tragedies force us to the relationship. In one of the many stories about Krishna, his devotees plead with him, "Bless us with tragedies, because then our minds will always be with you."

Daya Ma said, "When misfortune comes, whatever it is, remember, it is coming with His permission, but also with His blessing." So we can always take some benefit from it. There was a devotee who was an experienced skydiver, and one day he went skydiving with an old Army buddy. Their parachutes collided in midair and couldn't open properly. His buddy was killed, and the devotee lost both legs. Then his wife left him. But despite the awful tragedy he went through he said, "Through that incident I am a better individual." He went on with his life with faith and positive thinking. He walked again on artificial legs, and even skydived again. When a traumatic thing comes into your life - face it. Look at it, face it, and then take it to God.

Actor Lorne Greene had originally enrolled in a Canadian college as a chemical engineering major to please his father. His love of theater was beckoning to him, but knew he couldn't do both. Finally, he sought out his father's advice. "I could always talk to the man," Lorne said of him. His dad told him, "As it happens, I'm on my way to Toronto on business and I'll come visit you and we can talk." During that visit his father convinced him that he should follow his heart's desire and become a movie actor. Many years later Lorne found out that his father hadn't needed to go to Toronto on business at all, but had made that trip with the sole purpose to see him and talk to him.

We can *always* talk to God. A saint said, "I don't have any wisdom or devotion. I only know I have recourse to God." We should have explicit faith in the loving kindness of God.

Daya Ma said, "Don't be so attached to your own ideas, to your own desires, that you are determined that you are going to twist God's arm to do what *you* want Him to do, or to guide Him to tell you what *you* want to do. There's a danger in that."

Maybe what God wishes for us is different from what we want, and is actually *better*. It boils down to our will, or God's will. Surrender with love for God, veneration of His supremacy, faith, shradda (devotional faith) and trust - go to God with these. Brother Anilananda said he was once shocked to the bones with the greatest fear of his whole life. He ran to God, ran to his altar, and didn't move until there was resolution.

Time ago, Brother Turiyananda used to be in charge of the monks working in the Book Department. He'd been in the Swiss Army before he came into the ashram, and was energy in action, totally dynamic, magnetic, strong, and enthusiastic. The monks preferred the outside work, or sometimes got mops and buckets and washed the floors inside. The typewriters in the Book Department at that time were old manual typewriters, and one day the monks were given secretarial chores that they weren't exactly enthusiastic about.

Brother Turiyananda had no sympathy for this attitude and he quickly let them have it by pounding his hand - BOOM - on a metal file cabinet and bellowing, "If you want more strength ... Surrender!" (Laughter)

In the memorial booklet for Rajarsi Janakananda, Master wrote, "Now I see I have always to find the Divine's wish, and also to perform it according to the Divine's wishes. Then there is infinite joy."

Develop the relationship, *no matter what the circumstances are*. There was a Kriyaban devotee who strayed into wrong company. He got involved with drugs, and eventually he reached the point where all his friends were either dead or in jail. He later told one of the monks, "I realized I was in hell and could not get out, and that it would last forever. Then I thought, 'Well, I still have a Guru,' ... and when I thought that thought, everything became clear. I understood how I got in the predicament I was in, and I knew how to get out." That devotee turned to the Guru ... and what that brings is *relaxation*.

In Chapter 2, Verse 7 of the *Gita*, Arjuna addresses Krishna:

"With my inner nature overshadowed by weak sympathy and pity, with a mind in bewilderment about duty, I implore Thee to advise me what is the best path for me to follow. I am Thy disciple. Teach me, whose refuge is in Thee."

Arjuna finally surrenders to that inner relaxation ... and then ... *the Gita changes!* Krishna smiles on Arjuna and things start looking a whole lot better! If we turn to the Guru, then in this inner relaxation - in this faith - we can begin to do the techniques.

The Sanskrit word for faith is "visvas", which means "to breathe easy; to have trust; to be free from fear". To "breathe easy" also means "without breath"; and when we are without breath, then we can go up the spine - and things sure look different from the top floor looking down! (Laughter)

The Sanskrit word for faith is wonderfully expressive. It is visvas. The common literal rendering, "to breathe easy; have trust; be free from fear," does not convey the full meaning. Sanskrit svas refers to the motions of breath, implying thereby life and feeling. Vi conveys the meaning of "opposite; without." That is, he whose breath, life, and feeling are calm, he can have faith born of intuition; it cannot be possessed by persons who are emotionally restless. The cultivation of intuitive calmness requires unfoldment of the inner life. When developed sufficiently, intuition brings immediate comprehension of truth. You can have this marvelous realization. Meditation is the way. (From SRF Website)

You form the relationship of that faith and trust by deep meditation, and in activity as you try to do God's will. Faith is wonderfully expressed in Master's prayer: "I will reason, I will will, I will act; but guide Thou my reason, will, and activity to the right thing that I should do."

Do you ever feel like you have too much work? Master said, "God sometimes gives us more work than we can do; but if we believe, we are blessed with all the powers necessary to accomplish those tasks. There is no time element in God; whenever we believe in His power to work through us, it will work. First, we behold God as the doer and we as His instruments. Later, we see He is the doer and He is the instrument."

Talk about a relationship!! Wow!! To see that He is the doer *and* He is the instrument!!

Brother told us a story that demonstrated the importance of being faithful, and the great value of even short meditations: "When I was 11 or 12 years old, I used to cut across a lot on my way home from school. I had to walk by a house on the corner which was enclosed by a tall fence; the fence had narrow open spaces between the slats that you could peek through. The first time I cut across that area on the public right-away, a huge German shepherd on the other side slammed his body up against the fence at me, barking and growling fiercely. Startled, I jumped away.

After recovering from my shock I thought, "That's not right!" So every day after school I would come back to see that dog. I always got the same reaction - he would ram his body against the fence, barking and growling.

Still, day after day I returned, and little by little I found he would let me inch my way closer to the fence. Then one day I thought, "I wonder if I can touch the outside of the fence near where his head is?" Cautiously, I reached out my hand and was just about to touch the fence when I saw his lip go up and he growled.

More days passed. I continued to visit the dog every day, and one day he finally let me touch the fence. Next, I tried to get him to let me touch him, and one day he let me rub his neck. A few days later the lady who owned the dog came out and asked me if I would like to come in and play with the dog. "I've been watching you each day," she said.

Master said, "God is like a beautiful, highborn, inaccessible princess. Many men seek her hand in marriage and send her magnificent gifts. But the one who wins her does more than the others. By the exercise of long, patient ingenuity he succeeds in meeting her, and, finally, in convincing her of his eternal love."

That short visit of regularity with the dog worked - just a little visit each day. To develop your relationship with God, do even a little bit of the techniques if you can't do them all. Regularity is good even if it is short. Every day work on this beautiful divine relationship.

Gyanamata said, "On a day that may be distant, but is sure, it will be born, and you shall enter into the golden consummation which you have sought through many lives."

At night be with Him. Be ready to battle, with faith in your power. "Awake with Him already there," Master said. Affirm: "Come along, world, I am ready."

A Spiritual Perspective on Life's Experiences

Tuesday Evening Lecture - Brother Atmananda
(Minister at Lake Shrine)

Brother Atmananda said he found *Autobiography of a Yogi* while in college. It was, in fact, the textbook for a class he took. It turns out that the professor was an SRF Kriyaban!

At sacred places like Lake Shrine and Encinitas and Mother Center we see the beauty of God in nature, combined with the Guru's vibration. In the same way, behind the appearance of circumstance, behind the scene are God and Guru, guiding, directing, and helping souls to be where they need to be, particularly those who are ready to connect consciously.

Often times that connection comes via improbable circumstances. Brother told a story: One day he was driving around the San Francisco Bay area. He had driven around for quite a while just enjoying the scenery, and was almost ready to turn around to head back, but something told him, "No, keep on going."

So he kept on going, and happened upon a delightful scene of a mandolin player and violinist playing together in the middle of an idyllic scene of rolling grassy hills. He stopped to listen to them and to enjoy the beautiful, peaceful surroundings. A hawk circled overhead while they played and Brother thought, "Thank you, God, for this wonderful moment."

When the players had finished their impromptu concert, Brother came over to thank them. One of them, the mandolin player, noticed Brother's bangle.

"Is that an astrological bangle?" the man asked.

"Yes," Brother answered.

"Is that an astrological bangle from SRF?" the man continued. (Laughter)

"Yes!" Brother told him.

It turns out that the man knew of Master's teachings and was interested in the teachings, but hadn't pursued them, and did not even realize there was a Temple near his home. Brother told him about the Richmond Temple, and the man said he would attend the next Sunday service. "Oh, good," Brother told him, "because I'll be the one giving the service that day." (Laughter)

Thinking back to the little journey that brought them together in such improbable circumstances, and the little voice that prompted him to "keep going", Brother said it was like Master pointed and said, "Go further and go get *him*." (Laughter)

With a little knowledge, with a little thought, a little feeling, each one of us will see these little coincidences happening in our lives. The Guru *uses* us to touch others, and if we are in tune, if we look for it, we can see and acknowledge how Master uses us - a little nudge, a thought, a feeling - we will see it working for us, and through us for others - and it proves to us that there's a magic spiritual play going on behind all of life's experiences.

We've been given all the tools we need to build our spiritual life, and if we are in tune we will see it translated into actual experience. This is the foundation for tonight's talk, 'A Spiritual Perspective on Life's Experiences' - and that is the definition of wisdom. What we are trying to achieve is wisdom. Wisdom is the fruit of our spiritual effort. It means learning to see through the spiritual eye - learning to see what truly *is*, not what *seems* to be.

Gyanamata often wrote little notes to the nuns to help them with their sadhana. Her writings were pithy; they were packed with wisdom and spiritual guidance. Once she wrote to Daya Mata:

1. See nothing, look at nothing but your goal, ever shining before you.
2. The things that happen to us do not matter; what we become through them does.
3. Each day, accept everything as coming to you from God.

4. At night, give everything back into His hands.

If we anchor ourselves on these four pillars of wisdom, we will be safe in God. "The things that happen to us do not matter; what we become through them does." That's the challenge we have. The world tries hard to convince us that the things that happen really *do* matter. That's maya, which tries to shake us from our faith. What does it mean to look at life's experiences from a spiritual perspective? It means not to see those experiences as harmful, or dangerous, or bad, but to see them as helpful. Each experience is, in fact, given to us with love by God and Guru.

To develop wisdom we need to do two things: First, we must have a basic spiritual practice, our sadhana. Second, we must come to understand that the spiritual path is 24/7 - it's a way of life - and we must learn to keep a part of our consciousness all the time on God. We can go to church and group meditations to reset our compass, but it's what happens between our meditations that is very important - it's the other half of our sadhana. How you are progressing is not so much about ecstatic spiritual experience, but it's the overall trend of our thoughts that gives us insight to how we are doing in our sadhana.

Our basic sadhana consists of regular meditation, a longer meditation once a week, practicing the presence, and love for and desire for God. It's pretty simple, and if we do these things, then our interior life will begin to blossom and we will begin to feel the reality of who we truly are. It's a real milestone to move beyond our minds into our consciousness.

Attend your meditation group if you have one - this is very important. It's funny sometimes how when we most need a recharging of our spiritual batteries, paradoxically we often don't feel like it. It's a real paradox. Making the effort, allocating the time for meditation - the real beginning of spiritual life is when those spiritual ambitions get absorbed into your consciousness and thus effect your decisions and actions. This comes from your efforts.

You must go to battle with your karma. There was a devotee who protested that he couldn't be expected to succeed in reaching the heights of spiritual success the way Master had done because after all, "...Sir, you are a master!" Guruji replied, "All souls are equal. The only difference between you and me is that I made the effort."

"The things that happen to us do not matter; what we become through them does."
Many have guilt feelings of past mistakes. You may find yourself dwelling inordinately on them. It's common to all of us. It's part of being human, part of being exposed to maya, part of being caught in both the light and dark side of human life - the two parts of God's creation. We are immersed in that maya - in that duality of light and dark. But we have a choice. It's God's creation and we can't help but be exposed to it, but we have free will to choose. We have free choice.

"Don't allow the memory of mistakes to poison the rest of your life," Daya Ma said. But how often we embrace the mistakes we made. We hold on to them. This is wrong use of memory. Don't become downcast by mistakes or by things done unto us. We've all done things that were wrong. Master said to *get the lesson* from them - that is what we should do. Forget the details - throw them in the circular file. The *lesson* is what we should take forward. Learn from mistakes to change for the better - this is right attitude. We may have left a swath of destruction in our lives and even in other's lives too, but shame and guilt are not the point. The point is to *learn*. Just get the lesson from God and Guru which is the essence of what we need to learn, and forget the rest.

If you made a list of all the mistakes you ever made, you would probably find you have a big book of them sitting in your lap. The list might even be as thick as the JC Penney catalogue! (Laughter) But if you looked around, you'd notice that *everybody's* got one (Laughter) ... and they're all pretty much the same size! (More laughter)

It's part of being human. We need to separate circumstance from the lesson in that experience. But instead, how often do we carry our feelings of anger, injustice, guilt, and shame around like boulders in a sack? But if we introspect and ask, "What was *that* about? What were God and Guru trying to help me with through this?" - then we develop the latent spiritual powers within us, and we grow. The "bad" things that happened to us will evaporate at death, and it all becomes just a dream that we had to have to help us grow. So, hone in on the lesson, and let go of the details.

We tend to concentrate on the negative - it's a clever trick of maya. We don't acknowledge what we did right. Another trick is always comparing ourselves to others. "Oh, I'm so unspiritual. She's more spiritual than I am." The truth is, we have no idea what's going on in the spiritual life of others. There may be enormous difficulties and setbacks in others who seem so spiritually advanced. Comparison to others is harmful. Master said to look at your own plate only. As each moment unfolds we have the opportunity to grow. "Live each moment completely, and the future will take care of itself," Master said.

We tend to relive mistakes of the past and project them into the future, and then we are fearful and worrying about the future. Instead, be in the present moment: practice the presence, keep devotion in the background of your mind, take the consciousness within to the Christ Center, perform Hong-Sau, or do a few Kriyas. That consciousness of God within is what leads us to realize, "This drama around me is just a screen on which the play of my life is playing out!" The lessons are in the here-and-now moments.

If we go through each lesson in life with the right attitude and willingness to learn the lesson behind the experience, we will all ultimately achieve that supreme state of Self-realization. Then the suffering is over and we are Sat-Chit-Ananda - ever existing, ever conscious, ever-new bliss. Our soul *is* that, and the memory of that state is a seed drawing us forward. We've gone through *so* many incarnations of missing the point. Now we've been given a very clear picture by Master - we've got the information, we've got the techniques - so let us renew our motivation to practice his teachings. We are here for this week of Convocation to reinforce our motivation - to upgrade our practice.

Some may tend to think they can use their sadhana as a talisman to ward off bad experiences: "If I meditate then I won't have to face the skeleton in the closet." It doesn't work. For most of us there are one or two "biggies" that we are here to work on, staring us in the face, so to speak. Just accept it - say, "Okay, Lord, I won't run away from this anymore. You will give me the power to deal with it, to understand." Then you can make the necessary changes and leave it behind.

We will have those experiences - you are going to get knocked - it's a given. We are in duality, maya, which always threatens our spiritual equilibrium. You will be jolted, pushed, and shoved, and in order to maintain strength and stability within, we need evenmindedness.

The great sage Patanjali declared that yoga is stilling the waves of consciousness and feeling. That is how we achieve evenmindedness. As we practice yoga and move towards Self-realization, all of the complexities and paradoxes start to fall away, and life becomes more and more simple. If we are spiritually prepared, then in that shaking process we go through - and it is *God* shaking us up! - we will have the strength and stability within to practice evenmindedness.

Master said that these impure feelings, based on likes and dislikes, are entirely responsible for the bondage of the soul to the body and sense consciousness. We have to learn the art of remaining evenminded, non-attached, and calm within.

Start with little things. We can work on the little changes that come, one after another, and try to rise above the likes and dislikes. Every day all the monks come together at noontime for group meditation, and as you might guess, if there are thirty-five people in the room there will be thirty-five different ideas on what the room temperature should be - thirty-five different opinions about how much fresh air should be coming in. (Laughter)

Brother told us, "So there I am and I'm thinking, "Okay, I'm a yogi. I'm calm. Yes I am! (Laughter) " But why is he opening that window? It's only 45 degrees outside! Why ... he's sitting in *my* chair!!" (Laughter abounds in the audience)

Learn how to rise above it. Don't sweat the small stuff, as the saying goes. Ask yourself, "What if I can't make a change? Can I rise above it?" Think, "I'm not going to be bothered." The mind is a higher order of creation than the physical body. Once the body realizes the mind means business, it submits. We don't have to suffer those little discomforts if we learn to rise above them. The body will behave like a little spoiled child if the mind doesn't take charge.

The elder President Bush declared shortly after becoming President, "I do not like broccoli. I haven't liked it since I was a little kid and my mother made me eat it. And I'm President of the United States and I'm not going to eat any more broccoli. No more broccoli on the White House menu." (Laughter) This infuriated broccoli growers who sent tons of the vegetable to the White House in a humorous protest. (Laughter)

Brother remarked, "Now, what's *wrong* with Bush, anyway?? Broccoli is *great!* It's *brussel sprouts* that are really bad!" (Laughter)

Master said, "Essentially, conditions are neither good nor bad; they are always neutral, seeming to be either depressing or encouraging because of the sad or bright attitude of the mind of the individual concerned with them."

Circumstances are essentially neutral. It's our mind that judges. Situations are presented to us so we can *understand something*. But if we are thinking: "No, make that go away! ... He's wrong! ... I'm justified in feeling this way!" - that is wrong attitude.

All things in life are there for us to learn something. This is where yoga comes in. We do need to "hiss" occasionally. But we have to look inside and ask, "*Why* is this happening? *Why* am I responding emotionally this way?" There is a golden nugget inside each experience, and we can find it if we are willing to look. Look for it. Don't project it away with anger and blame. So often we knock it out of our way and say, "They're wrong! It's her. It's him." So then the same circumstance will have to come back in our lives until we get the lesson.

We have some influence on our lives, but not on our circumstances. Through the circumstances of our lives God is saying, "I want you to know, I want you to understand yourself." God and Guru's love is there unconditionally. It manifests as the joy and devotion we feel in meditation, and also behind all the karmic experiences of our lives. God's love is there because He wants us to get out of this arena of delusion.

He'll keep coming and saying, "Here! This is how to get out. Don't keep running away from the circumstances of your life. It's all being done to get you to see who you truly are!"

It's easy to think God is not in our life when things fall apart. The wise person who accepts responsibility to change and sees God behind all, sees things clearly. He says, "This is what I need to change, and I know God and Guru will help me."

When there's chaos in life we may say, "Okay, I see it, I got it." But we don't realize that we are looking through a window, and that window can be many different shapes and sizes. Which window are you looking through? It can be a big picture window that has been squeegeed every day, if there is no fear and no judgment, but only trust that God will give you understanding. Or it can be seeing through a little cloudy window that is dirty and grimy with unresolved issues of self-righteousness, denial, projection, blame and judgment.

Forgiveness is not acknowledging the other person was right, but affirming, "I am no longer willing to carry this burden of blame, accusation and judgment." The power of forgiveness is great. It's also the power of seeing others as children of God. Then we learn what Gyanamata said, that the things that happen to us are not important, but what we become through them is what matters.

Evenmindedness brings great happiness. It is of enormous importance on the spiritual path. Now add positive thinking. Positive thinking and evenmindedness are a very powerful combination. Positive thinking isn't denial; it is acceptance that we have problems and it is learning to deal with our karma, all the while affirming, "I am a child of God and I will accept the fact that I am a soul and I am worthy His love."

Do you believe you are worthy? If you are in SRF you've accepted that there is a divine Self. That Self is the Self that God loves. So let go of guilt, let go of self-blame. It takes repeated effort. There's no barrier between soul and Spirit. Look directly at your Guru's picture and say, "I know you see me as I really am. The real me is the me you look at with unconditional love." We can shed the costume of the human ego in meditation.

If you find yourself wanting to avoid God, stop and say, "You know me." Realize there is nothing shameful about anything you are going through. He totally loves you. He is helping you go through all of this. It's all a drama. Positive thought is not being a 'Pollyanna' unless you deny the existence of shadow and light. We don't *deny* problems and darkness - it is there as part of duality. What we practice is positive thought and evenmindedness in response to it.

There is a story in India that a saint said to his would-be disciple, "Son, it is necessary to bathe in the Ganges to purify the mind from sin. The sins will leave you while you bathe, for they cannot tolerate the holy waters. But take care, for they will wait in the trees skirting the river; and as soon as you come out of the sacred influence of the holy waters, they will again try to jump on you." "So if you were planning to do the Ganges," Brother added, "it's not a permanent solution! (Laughter)

During meditation, you may chant "Hong" and not even be able to get to "Sau" before your troubles and emotions come in to disrupt your practice. (Laughter) It's good to visualize yourself gathering all your emotions in a big ball and giving it to God and Guru, all the while remembering that He loves you unconditionally. And when the ball starts to roll back say, "No!" We do need to give ourselves rest, and that is what meditation is all about. Say, "I'm slamming the door to those emotions. I want to be alone with God."

Staying Connected to the Guru in Today's World Wednesday Afternoon - Teen and Young Adult Class

Brother Jayananda
(In charge of training of the Postulant monks at Encinitas)

Children and young people were very much appreciated by Master. He often talked of his school in Ranchi. He very much believed in the importance of his school, but realized that God was calling him to this country. He coined the term, "How to Live" with his "How to Live School" in India.

The teachings don't vary from older to younger ages - the same teachings are given to all. This age we are in now is a new age, and young people are quite different than previous generations. This generation wants to *understand*. The questions that come are, "*Why* are we doing this? They want to understand the principles of *why*, the reasons why we do what we do. We are just coming out of Kali Yuga and entering Dwapara Yuga, in which people are increasing in their spiritual understanding. People incarnating now have greater understanding and awareness. "So it is with great respect and a sense of privilege to talk to you today," Brother Jayananda said.

The battle of Kurukshetra occurred at the last descending Dwapara Yuga as it was heading to the lower Kali Yuga. This is the exact opposite of today in this ascending age. The Pandava brothers who had led the kingdom retired to the Himalayas and left Arjuna's grandson as king. The people left behind were not so wise - that was due to the descent into Kali Yuga. Their ancestors knew more than *they* did, which is the exact opposite of today. It must have been terribly depressing! In that increasing spiritual darkness, each

successive generation knows less and less until they end up just blindly following traditions, but they don't understand *why*. Now there is increasing in understanding and awareness, and you are all asking, "Why?" Master doesn't mind if we ask why - he doesn't want us just to follow blindly.

Our topic today is perfect, because it's the essence of the spiritual path: trying to stay connected to the *Guru*. Master left his body fifty years ago. Can we still stay connected? You bet we can! Here in the ashram we hear *so many* stories of devotees writing about Master's presence in their lives.

Many of the disciples who were with Master said that he didn't want them to become attached to his personality. Remember Daya Ma's story of how Master so often almost rudely pushed her away? Ma, in her anguish and in her determination to understand why he treated her this way, went out to meditate at Encinitas beneath the palm tree near the swimming pool, crying and meditating for hours, "Why is Master doing this to me?"

Many hours later after deep meditation and prayer for understanding, the answer came: "Master doesn't want me to be attached to his personality and his physical form - and I *am*. I must put Master on a deeper level."

Then as Ma walked back to the ashram Gyanamata came and said, "Master wants to see you." She went to him and he said nothing to her but blessed her and smiled, knowing that now she understood.

Master pushed the disciples if he needed to. One time Master sent two disciples back East on a business trip to pick up a car and drive it back to California. "Take a vacation on your way back," Master told them. "Be sure to enjoy all the sights - see Niagara Falls, take a boat ride on Lake Erie, and don't miss Yellowstone Park."

When they arrived at Lake Erie, there were no tickets available for the boat ride. They were about to turn away, but suddenly someone else cancelled their ticket, and so at the last minute they were able to take the beautiful, scenic boat ride. Then when they got to Yellowstone there were no hotel rooms available. But as they stood at the lobby desk wondering what to do, suddenly a room became available for them and they were delighted to discover that the room had a view overlooking 'Old Faithful'.

They wrote a letter to Master during the trip, describing all the sights they had seen. "Lake Erie is beautiful. We're having a wonderful time," etc. But during the entire trip, in their consciousness was an unspoken desire to get back home to Master. Finally they grew so anxious about wanting to be back where Master was that they decided to undertake a rather dangerous marathon journey through the hot desert in order to arrive home more quickly. They arrived back at Mt. Washington late at night, and rushed upstairs to see Master, thinking he would be pleased that they had arrived home earlier than expected.

But Master was not pleased at all! He sent for the letter they had written to him and read it aloud:

"Lake Erie is beautiful." ... I'M HOMESICK!

"We're having a wonderful time." ... I'M HOMESICK!

Master could read between the lines, and he knew of their underlying thought of homesickness. Then he scolded them roundly, "Who do you think opened your way across Lake Erie? Who do you think got you the hotel room at Yellowstone? Who helped you cross the hot desert? Why do you pinpoint me to this body? I was with you all the way. Don't circumscribe me to this room, or to this body!"

This was the *Guru's* discipline and training to all those who came to him. *Guruji* gave to others any training that they were receptive enough to hear. It's the same with us. How often we can vouch for his presence in our lives.

"I will be more able to help you after I am gone," Master said. "It's so hard to progress on the spiritual path, but it's the easiest thing if you surrender to a true *Guru*. I gave myself completely to my own wisdom-guided *Guru* and through that surrender I found freedom."

Staying connected to the *Guru* in today's world is a subject that appeals to the heart. How do we stay connected to the *Guru*? The first thing is: learn to behave.

Some devotees ask, "What exactly *is* the training that the monastics receive?" - as if they somehow think we have access to some secret text of different teachings - as if we are told, "Forget those other books, here's some others!" (Laughter) No, we here in the ashram have the same teachings as you do.

Guruji said, "My Master always used to remind me: 'Learn to behave.' He repeated this advice so often that I wondered if he were not overcautious about human behavior. But since that time I realize how important it is to everyone to learn the art of right behavior."

Learning to behave is especially necessary in the ashram in being with others in close living quarters. Master realized how important it was in his own training to know what needed to be corrected in himself. We have to strive always for an awareness of what needs correction in ourselves, and not idle in complacency, gazing in the mirror of our own hazy understanding and thinking that no further improvement is necessary.

Brother told us, "I had the privilege of working with *Daya Mata* at Mount Washington for a time. One day she pointed out to me that I needed to be more organized in my work. 'Ma, that's the way I am!' I told her. Later I made a mental note to myself, 'That's *not* what to say to Ma.' (Laughter) Ma's response to me was, 'Master would say to change yourself. Don't accept 'that's the way I am'. Master didn't accept that kind of logic.'"

"Another time *Ma* made a disciplinary comment to me and she noticed that I winced a little at her words. Then she told me, 'How would you react if one of the monks pointed out to you that you were missing a button on your shirt? You would just thank the person for pointing it out to you, wouldn't you? Learn to be the same way when people correct you - just realize where you need to change and take it at face value.'"

In the *Autobiography*, Master wrote, "An outsider occasionally berated *Sri Yukteswar* for an imaginary grievance. My imperturbable guru listened politely, analyzing himself to see if

any shred of truth lay within the denunciation." This is the essence of learning to behave so we can move toward our goal. Master said, "The basic law of right human behavior is self-reform."

You find people who know how to look at themselves and they know how to behave in any situation. Master knew how to behave properly, no matter where he was. One time he was invited to be the guest speaker at a hotel, and the dinner served was roast beef. Daya Ma was there with Master, and when she saw the roast beef on his plate she wondered how Master would behave in this situation.

Master didn't say, "Excuse me, I'm a vegetarian." Instead, he cut the roast beef, and moved it around on the plate a little, all the while talking to the people seated with him. Then he ate some peas and a little mashed potato, then he cut up some more of the roast beef and moved it around a little, and just kind of messed up the plate like that. No one noticed any of this because he was so engaged in talking with the others, and finally the waiter came and asked if he was finished. Master said, "Yes, thank you," and the waiter took the plate away, and it looked like he'd worked on the whole plate.

Brother saw first-hand how Daya Ma handles the proper way to behave in any situation, too. One time some business men came to Mt. Washington for a meeting with Ma. Brother was assigned to greet and escort the business men up to one of the 3rd floor rooms. They arrived all dressed up in suits, very professional and business-like. After the meeting, Brother showed them back to the main hall and one of them asked, "Tell me, who *is* she?" By his tone of voice, Brother could tell it was his way of saying, "I never met someone so wonderful." Even those who come to Ma for things like business and finance are touched by her love and caring. This man didn't know anything about SRF, but he wanted to know what made her so unusual. He had been touched by her loving nature.

When you learn how to behave, you will conduct yourself in a manner in which you feel always connected to the Guru, expressing only the highest, noblest qualities, and you will *know* you are the soul. It's not just proper manners; it's not just thoughtfulness, but it's knowing you are a soul. Then you really become an influence in life. It's nice to hear about how the saints act; but how about us? What can *we* do? It's a matter of learning to let the soul dictate to the body and mind, not the other way around. This is what the saints do.

The story is told of Civil war general Robert E. Lee, who, while riding his horse one day was approached by a mother with her child in her arms. "Can you give me any advice on raising my son?" she asked. General Lee answered her, "Teach him to deny himself."

What did he mean by that?

"Great people are full of "no's"," Master said. Great people can say "no" and mean it - "no" to moods, "no" to impulses. "Let me go to the refrigerator and see if I can find some ice cream" - "no." Show you have control over yourself. There is nothing wrong with eating ice cream; nevertheless, sometimes just say "no" to practice self-control. It's a tremendous strength you get from this; it is a habit that *can* be formed - to say "no" to things that are not in your highest interest.

Another aspect of staying connected to the Guru is service to others. Thoughtfulness is necessary for harmonious living. It doesn't have to be on a grand scale. There are plenty of opportunities in the situation where we are placed. At home, on the job - ask yourself, "How can I be helpful to others?" Develop an awareness of what other people need.

One time at Mt. Washington, Daya Mata and her sister Ananda Mata were outside around the area of the tennis court, meeting with some people who were showing them some building plans for a project on the grounds. Brother was in his office and the thought came to him, "Ma needs an umbrella in that hot sun." So he called around and found two umbrellas and bought them out. "How did you know?!" Ma said, "I was just thinking that I wished I had an umbrella." Brother told us, "I knew it wasn't my intuition, but just being thoughtful. Ma probably sent out that thought strongly and it registered in my mind."

Master said that higher feelings can be achieved by thoughtfulness. Understand the thoughts and moods of others, and you will understand yourself. Be kind to others and you will learn the secret art of being kind to yourself.

Take responsibility for your own stuff. Everything happens for some karmic reason. You are here to learn the lesson. Master compared life on earth to a school. When you graduate you won't have to come back.

Guru gives us the lessons, but the toughest times may be the most fruitful. When he sees difficulties in people's lives, Brother said he feels compassion but at the same time thinks, "Look how much they are learning. If they can learn the lesson, they will grow spiritually." Master said, "A smooth life is not a victorious life."

In meditation when we perform the techniques, the Guru is connected - he *is* there. It's THE great way to stay connected! Hold on to the after-effects of meditation. Then you see the miracles in life and you realize, "Oh yes - he *is* connected to me!"

Brother addressed the young ones in the audience: "You had the good karma to find these teachings at a young age before becoming established in habits, and in that you are blessed and privileged."

Develop a personal relationship with the Guru. Practice the presence, and share all difficulties and successes with him.

Master said, "If God is not conceived in such a way that we cannot do without Him in the satisfaction of a want, in our dealings with people, in earning money, in reading a book, in passing an examination, in the doing of the most trifling or the highest duties, then it is plain that we have not felt any connection between God and life."

You can feel your connection to the Guru no matter what you are doing. It's a very personal thing. You start to feel that Guru is your greatest friend and confidante. It's hard to find people in the world who even come *close* to that. Think of it! - Your best friend is an avatar! He loves you!

Remember the Chapter from the *Autobiography* about Kashi reborn? In the story, Master was sitting under a tree, surrounded by a group of students and they were asking him questions:

"Please tell me, sir," one youth inquired, "if I shall always stay with you in the path of renunciation."

"Ah, no," I replied, "you will be forcibly taken away to your home, and later you will marry."

Incredulous, he made a vehement protest. "Only if I am dead can I be carried home." But in a few months, his parents arrived to take him away, in spite of his tearful resistance; some years later, he did marry.

After answering many questions, I was addressed by a lad named Kashi. He was about twelve years old, a brilliant student, and beloved by all.

"Sir," he said, "what will be my fate?"

"You shall soon be dead." The reply came from my lips with an irresistible force. This unexpected disclosure shocked and grieved me as well as everyone present. Silently rebuking myself as an *enfant terrible*, I refused to answer further questions.

On our return to the school, Kashi came to my room.

"If I die, will you find me when I am reborn, and bring me again to the spiritual path?" He sobbed.

I felt constrained to refuse this difficult occult responsibility. But for weeks afterward, Kashi pressed me doggedly. Seeing him unnerved to the breaking point, I finally consoled him.

"Yes," I promised. "If the Heavenly Father lends His aid, I will try to find you."

Have you ever analyzed how that whole Chapter is set up? There's this graphic comparison - One boy tells him, "I'll never leave you on the path of renunciation", but he does eventually leave. And then Kashi says, "Please help me back to the spiritual path after I die and am reborn," and Master realizes how difficult it is to make this promise. This is the persistence of faith we must have - that no matter what, the Guru is looking after you and will help you.

Master wrote in the *Autobiography*:

"Lahiri Mahasaya left this world shortly after I had entered it. His picture, in an ornate frame, always graced our family altar in the various cities to which Father was transferred by his office. Many a morning and evening found Mother and me meditating before an improvised shrine, offering flowers dipped in fragrant sandalwood paste. With frankincense and myrrh as well as our united devotions, we honored the divinity which had found full expression in Lahiri Mahasaya.

His picture had a surpassing influence over my life. As I grew, the thought of the master grew with me. In meditation I would often see his photographic image emerge from its small frame and, taking a living form, sit before me. When I attempted to touch the feet of his luminous body, it would change and again become

the picture. As childhood slipped into boyhood, I found Lahiri Mahasaya transformed in my mind from a little image, cribbed in a frame, to a living, enlightening presence. I frequently prayed to him in moments of trial or confusion, finding within me his solacing direction."

This is the personal relationship the disciple has with the *Guru*. He is interested in your highest spiritual welfare. It's not just a nice idea. It's a necessity to stay connected to the *Guru*. That necessity eventually becomes a reality. Learn to behave, help others, and meditate. Then you will see you have always been connected. We will realize as we progress that we are always connected, and then everything will be clear.

Remember the passage from the *Autobiography* when Babaji awakens Lahiri Mahasaya to their prior relationship? Babaji had said, "Don't you remember, Lahiri? Surely this cave seems familiar to you?" Lahiri recounted the following:

"As I maintained a bewildered silence, the saint approached and struck me gently on the forehead. At his magnetic touch, a wondrous current swept through my brain, releasing the sweet seed-memories of my previous life.

"I remember! My voice was half-choked with joyous sobs. 'You are my guru Babaji, who has belonged to me always! Scenes of the past arise vividly in my mind; here in this cave I spent many years of my last incarnation!'"

"For more than three decades I have waited for you here - waited for you to return to me! Babaji's voice rang with celestial love. 'You slipped away and vanished into the tumultuous waves of the life beyond death. The magic wand of your karma touched you, and you were gone! Though you lost sight of me, never did I lose sight of you! I pursued you over the luminescent astral sea where the glorious angels sail. Through gloom, storm, upheaval, and light I followed you, like a mother bird guarding her young. As you lived out your human term of womb-life, and emerged a babe, my eye was ever on you. When you covered your tiny form in the lotus posture under the Nadia sands in your childhood, I was invisibly present! Patiently, month after month, year after year, I have watched over you, waiting for this perfect day. Now you are with me! Lo, here is your cave, loved of yore! I have kept it ever clean and ready for you. Here is your hallowed *asana* blanket, where you daily sat to fill your expanding heart with God! Behold there your bowl, from which you often drank the nectar prepared by me! See how I have kept the brass cup brightly polished, that you might drink again therefrom! My own, do you now understand?'"

This is what the *Guru* says to *all* his devotees. He cares that deeply for you. He is looking after each one of you. He watches us make all kinds of mistakes, but when that final meeting comes, imagine how we will feel, knowing we have someone who cares so much about us.

Master blesses you.

Meditation: The Spiritual Foundation of Our Lives

Wednesday Evening Lecture - Brother Vishwananda

The world is a crazy, hectic place. Most of you have struggles, and you may have difficulty finding time to meditate long enough while juggling your busy lives. Tonight I'm going to talk about some of the key elements to success in meditation and the spiritual life.

Now, just for a few moments, close your eyes and focus your attention at the Christ Center. Think of yourself at Lake Shrine, or standing on the stairs at Mother Center, waiting to enter the rooms where your Guru lived ... and just become aware of the aspect of God that you have right now. It might be peace, or light, or love. Whatever it is, just hold that aspect you have of God in your heart and at the Christ Center.

(We all sat in silent meditation for a few moments)

Now, with that consciousness, listen to this talk from that center of inner awareness.

Before we continue with tonight's talk, I have a message from Brother Anandamoy, who couldn't come this year due to some limitations. Brother's message is about the new photograph of Master that is available this year. It is his favorite picture of Master. Brother's message: "When you were in Master's physical presence you could feel his love. Of all the pictures of Master, this picture best captures that feeling." Brother Anandamoy continues to look at this picture and continues to feel his love.

Brother Vishwananda said, "Every year during Convocation I like to quietly visit all the different places of pilgrimage that the devotees are going to - Mother Center, Hollywood Temple, Forest Lawn, Lake Shrine - and seeing all the many devotees there meditating with others."

At Hollywood Temple this year I found a dear old friend. She and I used to meditate together before I came into the ashram. We were a meditation circle of two! She helped me switch to vegetarianism, and later encouraged me when I was thinking about monasticism. As we sat under one of the umbrellas at Hollywood Temple, she told me of her struggles with meditation, and then with a deep expression of friendship looked into my eyes and said, "Brother, I need some glue!" (Laughter)

Don't we all? Don't we all need a little glue?

Now, where is your consciousness? Is it still on your aspect from the exercise we just did? "Keep your mind at the Christ Center," Master said. It's very difficult in this active world with all its demands and responsibilities and tests and trials. It's very difficult to keep our attention there. We *do* need some glue in this world. Don't you wish there was a way to keep it there all the time? Don't you *wish* there was an easy, quick, simple way? In all cultures, even primitive cultures, as well as those more advanced, there have always been different concepts of *wishing*; "magic lamps" that you rub to invoke a genie so that you can get what you want easily; in India there is the "wishing tree" and "magic coins". Master has a wishing well ... and there is some writing on the well - have you read it? It says, "Meditate and make the wish," ... and Master underlined "the" three times! What is that wish? Each and every one of you has already made that wish. And it has already been fulfilled, or you wouldn't be sitting here tonight.

Master said, "A *wish* implies a helpless desire of the mind. A *desire* is a stronger wish; it is often followed by fitful efforts to manifest itself into action. An *intention*, or a determination, is a definite, strong desire expressed very forcefully once or twice through action for the accomplishment of a certain purpose. Such a determination, however strong, is often discouraged after one or perhaps several unsuccessful efforts. But a *volition* consists of a series of continuous, undiscourageable, unceasing determinations and acts revolving around a desire, until it becomes dynamic enough to produce the much-craved result. "Will and act until victory" is the slogan of all volitive activity. No matter how impossible of accomplishment his goal may seem, the man of volition never stops repeating conscious acts of determination to achieve it, as long as he lives."

That describes each one of us. The Vedas of India speak of, above all blessings, the three greatest blessings:

1. To be born in a human body - to have a spine and chakras, especially the higher centers
2. To have the desire to know God
3. To have a true Guru

And so through lifetimes of wishing - after lifetimes of fitful actions and struggling, after countless experiences of joy, pain, sorrows; after maybe thousands of lifetimes - we reach the point where we sense there's something more to life than what the mind can cognize through the senses. All of us here tonight have that burning desire to understand the true

purpose of life. We've all been blessed with the three greatest blessings mankind can experience. So meditate, and make the wish.

Now, where is your consciousness? If you lost your point of focus, ask yourself, "Where did it go?"

Right attitude: never doubt! Never doubt that you have the ability and the capacity to find God. And give yourself a little credit. Realize that it's not just God's grace. It all started with a *little wish*, plus all the struggles of lifetime after lifetime. Never forget that.

The Gita says: "Out of thousands, perhaps one seeks Me; and, among the blessed true seekers that try to reach Me, perhaps one knows Me as I am."

Each and every one of us has this potential. We made the effort, we have the good karma, and we have a true Guru - we have the potential to be that "one". Never forget that. This awakens both a sense of gratitude and self-confidence, doesn't it? We feel gratitude that God and guru heard our prayer, and we have self-confidence because God saw we are sincere and gave us this divine opportunity. With these two - gratitude and self-confidence - we have a tremendous foundation stone.

And then you find those dry times - and it continues day after day. You go up and down the spine not feeling much, and chanting and chanting (We all laughed, and Brother said, "It must be familiar!) Our meditations don't always give us results. And then there are times when you *are* getting results and your meditations improve. It's very important to remember where we are on the spiritual path - to remember that grace *has* come to you, *especially* during dry periods. Meditate, and make the wish, and strive and continue on to fulfill that wish.

The great Indian yogi, Shankara said, "No known comparison exists in the three worlds for a true Guru. If the philosopher's stone is assumed to be truly such, it can only turn iron into gold and not into another philosopher's stone. The venerated Teacher, on the other hand, creates equality with Himself in the disciple who takes refuge at His feet. The Guru is therefore peerless, nay transcendental."

In all our seeking, in all our heart's aching, in all the crying of our soul - God sends a Guru. The Guru is not one who just fulfills our wishes and desires, but he shows us the *purpose* of life: to find God. *The purpose of life is to find God*. Never forget that. There is no stronger foundation stone than to never forget that purpose.

Now, where is your consciousness? (Brother Vishwananda continued to ask this several more times during his talk, emphasizing how important it is to keep a portion of one's consciousness interiorized.)

Meditation is more than just a technique to help you find a little peace. It is to fulfill the only purpose of life - to find God. If you are willing to take advantage of this divine opportunity, *it has to become a way of life*. It must be that we use meditation not just to alleviate stress, or to find a little peace - but to be willing, to be determined, to have that *volition* - to use the opportunity you've been given to find God. I'm talking about attitudes

and understanding, which are the foundation stones that will help you to deepen your meditations and inspire you to make greater effort.

Many of you know that I was blessed to serve Guruji in India for many years. And now, here we are, at the Bonaventure in downtown Los Angeles. Here we are, in formal dress. But if we were in India, we might be under a tree sitting cross-legged in a little group. When Daya Ma came to India, the devotees got a carpet and placed it on a platform and she would sit with the disciples at her feet, just like Guruji did. I'm trying to share with you that spirit of India that is *so* essential. If it's not fully understood - if it's not grasped and practiced, it can greatly limit the results of your meditation.

When I was returning from India to the U.S., I came with another sadhu, Swami Nityananda. (Monastics are called "sadhus" in India.) It was his first visit here to the U.S., and he brought some gifts for all the monastics.

Since he was living near Babaji's cave, he brought some soil from the cave in little boxes. When we came through customs at the Los Angeles airport we saw green lines, yellow lines, and red lines. I was directed to a green line, but Swami Nityananda was guided to a red line. (Laughter) I thought I'd better join him in the red line in case he needed some help. I could see the face of Swami as this little scene unfolded - certainly he would have been viewed as a curious looking commodity there in the Los Angeles airport. Two customs officers duly inspected everything in his baggage ... and then they came to the boxes of soil. (Laughter)

"Did you declare this?" one officer asked. "What is this?"

"It's soil," Swami answered.

"*Soil?*" The officer frowned. "What's it for?"

"It came from a cave in the Himalayas. I have lots of friends here and I'm going to give it to them." (Laughter)

Swami looked pleadingly over at me, but there was nothing I could do.

"You're going to give your friends *dirt* as a gift?" (Much laughter)

"Yes," Swami said.

Then the officer got real serious. "What IS this??" (Much laughter)

Swami paused, then looked directly in his eyes and said, "It's holy."

"Holy?" the officer said, then looked over at the other officer. "He said it's *holy*."

They put the lid on the box, packed Swami's suitcase for him, and we left. (Laughter)

In your daily life, how often do you hear the word "holy" or "sacred"? "Holy" is an uncommon word, isn't it. Yet, as I walked around the Convocation and the pilgrimage tours this year, seeing you all here, and knowing of the sacrifices many of you have made to come here to these holy places - as I watched you all at Hollywood Temple - just sitting at the back of the Temple and watching the many devotees pronaming at the altar, and I saw the awe and the love in their eyes and the joy in their faces as they sat to meditate, the gratitude in their faces as they walked on those holy grounds - and at Mother Center as I watched all

the devotees lined up the stairs waiting to enter Master's rooms, and saw with what anticipation they waited to enter the room where their Guru lived - it was holy.

What does it *feel* like to walk the grounds where your Guru lived? Don't use your head. What does it *feel* like? What devotion does it stir in you? What longing? When I greet you on that final day of Convocation, many or most of you express almost the exact same sentiment: "I can hardly wait till next year!"

Haven't you had a special experience? It's something totally out of the ordinary - something *holy*. Something beyond our senses has happened. Something *sacred*. It's a presence our Guru established. He is still here, even though he's not in physical presence.

If Guruji really is an avatar - which he *is* - one who has Cosmic Consciousness, oneness with God, is he gone because he doesn't have a body? No. He's not gone. Think about this. Concentrate on the *feeling* you experience as you go on pilgrimage. As you are on the stairs waiting to go to Master's rooms, think about this: Where does Guruji live? He's here at the spiritual eye and in our hearts - *this* is your holy pilgrimage.

If you really want to find God, it should be with *that* attitude - that every meditation is a holy sacred pilgrimage to where Guruji lives. Every meditation should be holy. Every meditation is sacred, because you are going to the feet of your Guru - to the one who knows God. You are going to the one who is going to introduce you to God and fulfill the purpose of life. It's holy. It's vital. It's holy.

The techniques are not enough. It's techniques plus devotion. When dry times come, when meditation seems just mechanical, what's gonna keep you going? Remember, it's holy. It's sacred. It's the opportunity of lifetimes to be handed Kriya yoga. Brother told us, "I never dreamed of the blessings that would come into my life when I was handed *Autobiography of a Yogi*. All my questions were answered, one after another, after another."

You are in the presence of your Guru. Every meditation is a holy pilgrimage. Remember that. Otherwise meditation is just a technique, just a routine. It's holy. You've waited lifetimes for that opportunity.

There are some basic things - the foundation stones - for true, deep meditation, to help you reach the point where you experience God:

Sit up straight. (We all immediately shifted in enthusiastic obedience, and with sparkling eyes Brother observed our united response - "Like a wave..." he said, and we all laughed) Posture is very, very important; don't neglect it.

Be *intense*, but not *tense*. The mind has to be awake; it has to be on fire for God. Remember, you are going on pilgrimage to your Guru. Meditation is the vehicle to carry you to divine love, joy, and peace.

Brother said, "I received Kriya initiation in the early '70's in Ranchi from Daya Ma, and during the initiation Ma demonstrated the technique for us by practicing two kriyas. As she did this we could feel her divine communion, and we waited ... one minute ... then two minutes ... four minutes ... seven minutes ... and Ma was utterly still, with this blissful expression on her face. Finally she opened her eyes and said, "All right my dears, let's continue now." (Laughter) Such intensity! Two kriyas was all it took and she achieved communion with God. It takes hard, serious work to achieve that. If you are half-hearted you won't achieve that state - you can't.

This is what we all want, and we've come this far. Gurujī doesn't dangle carrots. He knows we have it within us to get there - to get into the spine and higher centers where God can be experienced.

Be still. One time I was watching the monks meditate, checking their posture, and one devotee was, as the saying goes, "a restless drunken monkey stung by a bee." (Laughter) I thought, "Gosh, how can he meditate?" This went on for fifteen minutes! - adjusting his pillow, moving his position. Then finally he was calm for a few minutes. But pretty soon it was more movement, then off with his glasses - and I thought, "Is he near-sighted or far-sighted? Does he think God is near or does he think He is far away?" (Laughter)

Now think: when you move, where is your life force? It's back out in the body, back out in the muscles, back out in the senses, isn't it. So when you move, what have you done? You have consciously made the decision to counteract your efforts. Sit still. You achieve this gradually. How to progress? When you think you can't meditate anymore, sit still for two more minutes, or three more, five more. Learn to be still.

What should be our attitude, our feeling, our state of consciousness, when we first sit to meditate? It's a holy pilgrimage. Have *gratitude* that we have these blessed techniques to find God.

Consciously set aside all the thoughts and cares of the world. I've gone to meetings where they actually have you write down your worries and concerns and leave them in a bowl outside the door. Do that mentally. Don't take them with you into meditation. Make a conscious effort, and then it will be much easier to go within.

Most importantly, after the techniques don't jump up. The meditation techniques help us to concentrate the mind and withdraw the energy to the higher centers. After practicing the techniques, sit still and just enjoy the results and commune with God. It may just be calmness, or peace, or a little joy. Don't just think about it or concentrate on it. Remember that through the meditation process, the peace or the love, or the joy, or the bliss you feel is not something you *attach* to yourself - it is not something to be attained - *it is your true nature*. Remember that. That *is* your true nature, your oneness with God. It is the experience of your true nature. *Live* in that experience; become familiar with that experience.

In India, a swami wears an ochre cloth; a simple ochre cloth. The ochre color is made from mud - earth from the rivers of Varanasi, one of the holy cities in India. The cloth gets washed and eventually the color gets bleached out by the sun, so periodically they must be dipped again in the ochre. Similarly, the more you dip the cloth of your awareness in meditation, the more you remember the reality of your true nature.

When finally you have to open your eyes, you find that the problems and worries are still there. In India it is said that it is necessary to bathe in the Ganges to purify the mind from sin. The sins will leave you while you bathe, for they cannot tolerate the holy waters. But like monkeys, they will wait in the trees skirting the river, and as soon as you come out of the sacred influence of the holy waters, they will again try to jump on you. Doesn't it feel that way sometimes? (Laughter) The world is a very demanding place.

Daya Ma came to India in 1972, and that is when I first met her in person. Ma's companion in India was her sister, Ananda Ma, and she took me under her wing - I would often be running errands for her. There was a large hall where Ma gave satsanga. The room had high ceilings, and on all four walls were pictures of the gurus and saints that Master speaks of in *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

One day, Ananda Ma called me and said, "Daya Ma noticed that these pictures are not all in line, but are hung rather haphazardly, and she's asked us to rearrange them." So I found a ladder, and one by one we started re-hanging the pictures. It was quite a process "... a little higher ... no, lower ..." up and down the ladder again and again. (Laughter) This went on all morning. Finally we had it perfect, and when Ma came to see them she praised us. "You've done a wonderful job," she told us, and together we all gazed for a moment at the pictures. ".....but Mataji," she added, "wouldn't they look better if they were an inch higher?" (Much laughter)

It took all afternoon, up and down that ladder - to the right ... to the left - but it was *pure* joy. To see the enthusiasm, the dedication, the attention that Ananda Ma gave to that simple task is something I will never forget. In everything she did there was a fervor - and this is true of these great examples of Master's disciples; there is a fervor in everything they do.

Daya Ma brings some spiritual principle to everything she does, and this proved to me that she is not doing it for herself, but for her Guru. And that's the test for us all. The secret is to learn to hang on to that inner awareness and deal with all situations in life in that consciousness. It means dipping the cloth of your inner awareness in meditation. The longer and deeper you meditate, the more you have that awareness of your true self. Otherwise the world will sweep you away. It's vital. It's vital.

Practicing the presence, prayer before our meditations, looking to the God in others, positive thinking - we've been given all these tools to help us retain that consciousness. At the end of the day we should ask ourselves, "Where is my consciousness?" If you made the effort during the day, then when you sit to meditate, you don't have to start all over again.

That's how you'll be able to go deep in meditation and retain that consciousness throughout all the tests and trials of life.

One more aspect of spiritual life: there is one thing that God does not have - our love. And what is that love worth to God if we place conditions on it? We must love God *unconditionally*. We can do this in many ways, but there are two main ways:

1. In meditation. Meditate with love and devotion and attention, even if you don't get results. Even advanced devotees who've been on the path a long time - God will test you to see if your love is unconditional. There will be dry periods.
2. In your daily life. You will have times when you feel beat up, pulverized. But you go on practicing divine laws and hang on to that divine consciousness.

In a letter to the monastics, Daya Ma wrote, "When you pass to the other side, Divine Mother won't ask how many eloquent speeches you gave, or how many buildings you built, or how many memos you sent. She will ask, "My child, did you love me? Did you love me?"

St. Francis of Assisi wrote:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Master, grant that I may never seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

There is so much we can do to show unconditional love for God. Change your consciousness. Change your attitude. There was a devotee who has now passed on, but when he was alive, dying from cancer, a few weeks before he passed he came to see me and he said, "It's a miracle!"

I thought, "Oh, he's been cured!" Then he told me the miracle. "God has blessed me with right attitude." He had surrendered. Even in that situation, he gave it to God and went on loving and seeking Him.

Last week someone asked me, "Is Convocation like the Kumba Mela?" The last Kumba was in Allabad, and I attended it. During that month of the Kumba there were four main

auspicious days to bathe in the Ganges. Millions of people converge at this sacred spot - there are *so* many people, but it is very orderly and peaceful.

Outwardly, you can't compare Convocation to the Kumba Mela. Even spiritually, it's not the same. The reason? At the Kumba Mela, those millions of people may not have a guru. They may have just a *wish*. One man found SRF after seeking for a guru for fifty years. After *fifty years* he came and asked, "Will you be my guru?"

No, you can't compare Convocation with the Kumba. It's not the same. We *have* a guru. We *have* a path. We *have* the means, the techniques. We *have* Kriya yoga to burn our past karma, and we have the teachings so we don't create new karma. We have communion with God. It's a oneness that is unique.

Each and every one of you - on pilgrimage, on the houseboat at Lake Shrine, in the windmill, waiting in line to go to Master's shrine - each one of you have an expectation in your heart of what you are going to experience. It's a presence and a oneness we all feel.

We feel it *now*. When's the last time you thought about the world? We have a living Guru. When we come together, our united love and devotion draws a greater blessing. It's a little taste of going on the inner pilgrimage where our Guru is. He still lives. He still serves. He still loves us. He is embracing us, encouraging us, and he is telling us, "Yes, you can find God in this lifetime."

Where is your consciousness? Don't lose it. It's precious. It's holy.

Thursday Morning Satsanga

Sister Mridani

God ordains the Guru - it's important to remember that we don't stumble onto this path.

Q. Why does Master use the words "man", "mankind", "brotherhood"? Why doesn't he emphasize woman's equality?

A. It is very important to understand that the word "man" is rooted in the original Sanskrit word "manas", which means "mind" - the uniquely human capacity for rational thought. That consciousness is neither female nor male. Gururji's teachings are from a higher age. His message would not be as clearly stated if he had used a "politically correct" "his/her", "he/she" format. Master emphasized the unfoldment of the perfect balance of the soul of both male and female qualities.

Man. The word is derived from the same root as Sanskrit *manas*, mind - the uniquely human capacity for rational thought. The science of yoga deals with human consciousness from the point of view of the essentially androgynous Self (atman). As there is no other terminology in English that would convey these psychological and spiritual truths without excessive literary awkwardness, the use of *man* and related terms has been retained in this publication - not in the narrowly exclusive sense of the word *man*, denoting only half of the human race, but in its broader original meaning. (SRF Publications Glossary)

Q. Many churches take a stand on moral and social issues. Why doesn't SRF? Isn't it important for SRF's voice to be heard?

A. Master had one aim, one goal - to teach mankind Kriya yoga - God-realization. Master's mission was given directly to him by Babaji. "You are the one to spread the teachings to the West," Babaji told him. Kriya yoga will aid in creating a peaceful society when man gains God contact, because then we will gain the inner guidance, the intuition, the discrimination to answer and solve all of our questions.

The cure for all ills is individual Self-realization. We have to act according to our inner guidance. There is individual karma, and there is mass karma, resulting in negative world events. Moral issues *are* important. SRF prays for the suffering of mankind - it's not that they don't care. We must pray, not that suffering cease, but that whatever experiences come to each one, that by these experiences each individual learns the lesson in them. "The earth is neither the lowest nor the highest planet," Master said.

"But I gather we're closer to the lower," added Sister. (Laughter)
But we have the techniques that will take us to Self-realization.

Gyanamata said, "It all boils down to this: We incarnate here on this plane in order to learn certain lessons, gain necessary experiences, do work we are fitted to do. We take up our appointed positions, and we cannot have what belongs to another. We get our own - neither more nor less. It is only by cooperating with our karma that we find the path of peace and blessedness."

Q. I have a deep yearning for God, but also four children and a fulltime job. There is just not time for everything, and I feel very frustrated. I have spoken with a spiritual counselor who said, "Just do the best you can," but my best just doesn't seem to be enough.

A. First, you should know that all the monastics would say to you that you have our deepest admiration. In 1939, Master gave a lecture and he said, "If you practice one millionth of the things I teach you, you *will* find God." Even if you have four children and a fulltime job, it *can* be done. Master had only a very short time in human form to give us the teachings in writing. These are the teachings of a very high age. We are close to a very low age, and it's not expected that we can do *everything* - we are only asked to *try*. Just do the best you can. Especially in the little gaps of time, fill your mind with God. Through daily introspection you will know if you are doing the best you can.

There is a story about a saint who sometimes threw stones at his disciples. Those who, with devotion, picked up the stones and carried them home, found that they had golden nuggets. Those who left them lying on the ground missed the blessing. What are the stones? The stones are all the things that are difficult to do on a daily basis. "And with four children, I'm sure you find quite a few stones lying on the ground," Sister added. (Laughter)

"You must develop the will to think of God during activity," Master said. Divine Mother rewards every sincere effort, no matter how small, because for you it may be a supreme effort; for someone else easy.

Q. Regarding the power of the mind - in my mind I am a child of God, but I feel like a worm much of the time when I feel I'm not spiritual enough. How to change "worm consciousness" into Christ Consciousness? I want to be successful in finding God in this life.

A. Mind is the creator of everything. The soul has identified itself with the feelings and emotions created by the mind. For so long you have thought of yourself as having certain qualities, with their characteristic feelings and emotions. Patanjali says you are masquerading as these passions and desires because you have done it for so many incarnations that you have utterly forgotten your real nature.

How to get back to your real nature, which is pure calm Spirit? You must dissolve the feelings and emotions connected with body consciousness. Meditation is the way. "You can change what you are by thought alone," Master said.

Each thought puts a "groove" of a subtle electrical pathway in the physiological brain and subconscious mind. The same thoughts repeated over and over become mental habits that become set like clay, making it difficult to change.

But Master says whatever you have created or done you can undo. We can use our willpower like a chemical to break and dissolve that hardened clay of mental habits. By willpower you can change anything. By concentration and willpower you can erase even deep grooves of long-standing habits.

Sister told us that her grandmother was the child of a coalminer. She had a very tough childhood, but every note Sister ever received from her was signed, "Love, GG" (for Grandma and Grandpa) "and God's best to you." Her grandmother truly believed that everything that came into life was "God's best to you".

We have to watch our thoughts and consciousness, and strive always to put everything in a positive frame of thought. With anything in the external world that acts on our minds - cold air, warm air, people saying things to us - if we can learn to identify our habitual thought patterns that follow in response, then we can begin to get a handle on them, and then we've already fought half the battle. Master said we have 12 to 15 thousand thoughts a day. Master said he got up to 500 thousand in one day! (Laughter)

Each thought is formed of four parts: (see Lesson 161)

1. **Sensation** - hot, cold, hard, soft, etc. Stimuli touch the nerve endings and are transmitted through the nerve wires as sensations
2. **Perception** - A sensation produced in the mind through contact with material objects is elaborated into perception
3. **Conception** - Perception expands into conception
4. **Feeling** - Conception changes into feeling

At step four, feeling immediately passes judgment. Feeling classifies all experiences as being pleasurable or painful according to its own preconceived likes and dislikes. So that moment between conception and feeling is very important - this is where we need to get hold of our negative thought patterns. Once we are able to change a damaging thought pattern, we can control what affects us. And then you never know how close you are to getting rid of it *forever!*

Every day we slough off thousands of cells. Each cell is a blueprint of who we are; each cell contains a blueprint of our thoughts. We have the ability through willpower to overcome and create new blueprints by making new thought patterns. When we cultivate new thought patterns, *every new cell is formed with a new blueprint.* We become better people!

Sri Yukteswar said, "The vanished lives of all men are dark with many shames." The mind is the miracle of all miracles, because it is through the mind that we can change. We can overcome our wrong thoughts on a daily basis. We can create anew by merely watching our thought patterns.

Master tells us, "Forget the past, for it is beyond your domain. Forget the future, for it is beyond your reach. Control the present. Live supremely well now. It will whitewash the dark past and compel the future to be bright, when it arrives. This is the way of the wise."

There was a devotee in her 80's who was disturbed and very worried. She told Sister, "I'm afraid I won't be with Master when I die, and I fear that I won't be with him in my next incarnation."

Now, Master said that the predominate nature of our thoughts will all come together at the moment of passing. Those thoughts will thrust us into a particular plane of the astral world and those thoughts will determine what our next life will be.

Sister asked the woman, "Who do you think of, who do you pray to every day?"

"God and Master," the woman answered.

"And who do you think you'll see at death?" Sister asked.

"Oh, Master," the woman said. (Laughter)

Keeping the thought of the Guru foremost in our minds will carry us into a new and better incarnation.

Q. Regarding relationships, I have trouble getting along with others. There are always conflicts arising, and I can't seem to get a handle on them.

A. It is good to review the Chapter entitled "The Art of Getting Along in This World", in *Journey to Self-Realization*.

Master said, "God is all-sufficient unto Himself. No doubt it is easy for Him to get along with Himself; He has no one with whom He can disagree. But at the same time, one part of God is not secluded at all: He is collectively active in the flowers and in the birds and fishes and in all forms of life on this planet - in the millions of human beings and in every creature - and He is very busy in the electromagnetic laws of the universe, and in the copious laws He has set forth to govern the sphere of manifestation. So in this sense He is not individualistic; and He has to get along with the diversity in His creation - this vast variety in which He Himself is contradicting Himself. He wants us, similarly, to learn to get along with our own self and with others."

The first thing we must do is learn how to get along with ourselves. First and foremost you must learn to know yourself, like yourself, and then to truly to appreciate and love yourself. When you learn to get along with yourself, you will know how to get along with everybody. This is where you work on those habitual "wormy" thought patterns. (Laughter)

If we are in conflict with ourselves - if there is any resentment or unhappiness - you can hide from yourself, but you can't hide it from others. Anger and conflict causes restlessness, which causes us to misunderstand others. We end up reacting the wrong way, and then we don't get along. Evenmindedness gives you the ability to see where truth is impaired. We have to learn to recognize these behaviors, and to really listen to what another is saying. Truly, it is amazing that anyone gets along with anyone else in this delusive world.

Our conscience is the voice of the Guru trying to speak to you. Master wrote in his poem, *When I Am Only a Dream*:

I come to tell you all of Him,
And the way to encase Him in your bosom,
And of the discipline that brings His grace.
Those of you who have asked me
To guide you to my Beloved's presence -
I warn you through my silently talking mind,
Or speak to you through a gentle significant glance,
Or whisper to you through my love,
Or loudly dissuade you when you stray away from Him.

If you are not doing the right thing, it's reassuring to know that the Guru is always there trying to help and guide us. Master said, "Evenness of mind must remain constant, that it may serve as a foundation of your existence."

Gyanamata said, "These three instructions, plus meditation, contain the only rule of life that any disciple needs: detachment; realization of God as a Giver; and unruffled patience. As long as we fail in any one of these three, we still have a serious spiritual defect to overcome."

Sri Yukteswar said, "The heart's natural love is the principal requisite to attain a holy life. When this love, the heavenly gift of Nature, appears in the heart, it removes all causes of excitation from the system and cools it down to a perfectly normal state. When this love becomes developed in man it makes him able to understand the real position of his own Self as well as of others surrounding him. Hence the culture of this love, the heavenly gift, is the principle requisite for the attainment of holy salvation."

Each human being is a speck not only of God-consciousness, but of His heart. It's something natural we have, and we can employ it to bring us evenness of mind and bring us back to Guru.

"To keep company with the Guru," Sri Yukteswar said, "is to associate him with Sraddha, the heart's love intensified, by keeping his appearance and attributes fully in mind, and by reflecting on the same and affectionately *following his instructions, lamblike.*"

And Sri Yukteswar talks about removing the eight meannesses of the heart, the eight bondages or snares: hatred, shame, fear, grief, condemnation, race prejudice, pride of family, smugness. Removal of these eight obstacles leads to magnanimity of the heart, and then we will be in harmony with others. Our beloved Daya Ma is a good example of that magnanimity of heart. She is sending blessings to you all. You have no idea how much she cares for each one of you. Sri Yukteswar says to focus on the heart's natural love as directed towards the Guru, and the eight meannesses will *automatically* be removed.

Tara Mata once said, "To my mind there is no such thing as a personal problem. It's all a part of maya - our one common enemy - as all are subject to the same delusion. God created maya. He only wants us to resist it."

Q. I know Master is omnipresent and that he watches over me in all steps of my spiritual unfoldment, but find that I am still anxious and fearful under certain circumstances.

A. Master said that if you practice the techniques, you shall have safety *forever*. You will have safety for yourself, plus there will be safety for all your dear ones and all those entrusted to you by God. That's a powerful promise. Gururji is an avatar - his state of consciousness is beyond human comprehension, and *an avatar's word cannot be falsified*. So we should hold him to it. We must do our part, but it is true. Ask him to help you. Ask Guru to show you how this works if you don't believe.

It doesn't mean nothing *seemingly* bad will happen. The Guru's work is to bring to us all the experiences we need to reach liberation. When they come, we must say, as Master said, "Whatever conditions confront me, I know that they represent the next step in my unfoldment. I will welcome all tests because I know that within me is the intelligence to understand, and the power to overcome."

The heart is the seat of feeling. The heart will cry, it will bleed, but the mind should never get overwhelmed. We must keep the mind from getting sucked into the feelings of the heart.

In the *Lessons* Master gives a technique to use if you are feeling fearful: (Note: In this Satsanga, Sister did not give details of the technique, but it is listed below)

Put your hand over your heart, next to the skin. Rub from left to right and repeat, "Heavenly Father, I am free. Tune out this fear from my heart radio." Do this for five minutes. It works. Then at night, before sleep say, "The Heavenly Father is with me; I am protected." Then chant "Om" three times and you will feel His wonderful protection.

Master said, "Just as you tune out static on an ordinary radio, so if you continuously rub the heart from left to right and continuously concentrate on the thought that you want to tune out fear from your heart, it will go; and the joy of God will be perceived."

"One time when I was young," Sister said, "I went out on the roof of our house with my dad to fix the roof. He pointed and said, 'See the rafters? Only walk on the rafters and you will be safe. Otherwise you might put your foot through the roof!'"

"Then just yesterday," Sister continued, "I was watching a house being roofed, and I thought, 'If we hold to the teachings - and that's our spiritual structure - we can walk across the roof of delusion. Those rafters will keep us from falling into deep holes.'"

Gyanamata said, "The fight has to be waged again and again against our only real enemy, the self. Take firm hold of the Guru's robe, and let nothing unclench your fingers."

Master said, "Ask the help of the Guru again and again. Obey this order to the limit." This is the key: we have to ask. Asking for the Guru's help breaks down the ego and makes a channel through which God can speak to us.

In his poem, "When I Am Only a Dream" Master tells us, "Unknown I will walk by your side, and guard you with invisible arms..." Memorize these truths so you can use them to help you.

Transmute fear by putting something else in its place; put thanksgiving in its place. Master said, "Thanksgiving and praise open in your consciousness the way for spiritual growth and supply to come to you. Spirit pushes Itself out into visible manifestation as soon as a channel is opened through which It can flow."

Gyanamata said, "The greatest thing of the life of the disciple is to be able to look in the face of the guru and say: "I will accept anything. Treat me in any way that seems best to you in order that in the end I may be what you are."

Q. I live in a big city, and often receive invitations from my spiritual friends to go with them when a holy person is visiting the area. Is this okay to do? My friends are of the opinion that "more is better". If I don't go, am I missing a blessing?

A. Firstly, you *already have* more and better!! We have a Guru who has the ability to turn us into what he is, if we follow his teachings. There is no greater blessing. We don't want to close any windows or channels, or put up any barriers for that blessing of the Guru to flow to us.

Remember the words of Sri Yukteswar: "To keep company with the Guru is to associate him with Sraddha, the heart's love intensified, by keeping his appearance and attributes fully in mind, and by reflecting on the same and affectionately following his instructions, lamblike."

God chooses the Guru. We've all lived millions of lives and we've finally got the Guru. When will we get it?

Wouldn't it be better just to utter the name of Babaji with reverence and attract an *instant* blessing? No travel, no lines - you don't have to do anything!! (Laughter)

Sister said she was driving by herself one night and she just kept on chanting, "Babaji ... Babaji ... Babaji," and everything was fine. Chanting his name attracts an instant blessing and protection. Why are people going here and there? People want to have something that feels good for the moment.

Have gratitude - appreciate the great blessing you have already been given. One time Sister was in Encinitas hosting a group of senior citizens. They were not on the path, but were interested to know how the Encinitas hermitage and grounds came into being. After Sister had given them some general answers about the SRF teachings, one lady piped up, "Honey, I'm 82 years old. I don't have much time left and I want to know how to do this!" (Laughter) Sister gave her the *Lessons* application.

There was a devotee who had a certain problem situation in life that kept coming up repeatedly, but she just couldn't get it right. Finally after many failings, she remembered to follow Master's instructions. Later she said that the blessing that came was so powerful that she had to hold onto the wall.

Look for the blessings of the Guru everywhere. One time Sister counted up all the promises that Master makes in the *Autobiography* - and there were *hundreds!* (Sister didn't even count the promises in Master's other writings.) The Guru will fulfill them all if we do our part. Hasn't he provided you with blessings and gifts that only could have come from him? - things that no one else knew you desired? He wishes to give them to you.

It says in the Bible (Malachi 3:10) "...prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

That is what the Guru gives us. Daya Ma said, "Just remember that God is just as close this moment as your thought allows Him to be."

Gyanamata said, "The masters, the Good shepherds of this world, come down from their high places and give their lives to searching for disciples who are lost in the darkness. They find them in desolate and dangerous places, arouse them, lift them to a divine shoulder, and bear them with rejoicing to a safe place in the fold. They feed them with celestial food and give them living water to drink, of which, if a man eat and drink, he shall live forever. They give them power to become the sons of God. They give their own lives, to the last ounce of flesh and the last drop of blood, for the redemption of the sheep who know their voice."

This is the consciousness we all want to develop. The Guru is someone who understands you completely and is helping you at every moment. He knows your thoughts, if you have asked him to do that. There's no one else in this room but you and God and Guru. Everything is a manifestation of God to help you get back to God. He will come to you when he is called, and when he is needed.

At the very end of *The Holy Science*, Sri Yukteswar quotes the words of the great sage Shankara: "Life is always unsafe and unstable, like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. The company of a divine personage, even for a moment, can save and redeem us."

Guru and Disciple: A Journey to Freedom

Thursday Evening Lecture - Brother Satyananda (Lives and serves at the Phoenix Temple)

We're all in training for Hiranyaloka. Each one of us is on a unique soul journey, walking with our Guru. There are two questions each one of us has that we keep secret:

1. How do I know if I am truly progressing?
2. How do I know if the way I live my life is pleasing to my Guru?

Only an avatar can truly know the spiritual advancement of a disciple. It's a sacred relationship between Guru and disciple. And only you can know the answer to the second question. However, Sri Yukteswar addresses these questions in *The Holy Science*, Chapter 3, Sutras 23-32. He talks of what he calls the five stages of the heart. Sri Yukteswar said, "By these different states of the heart man is classified, and his evolutionary status determined," and he offers us a comforting definition of spiritual progress according to the natural unfoldment of the heart. It is the Guru and disciple walking together on a journey of the heart.

These five stages of advancement are part of the universal architecture that God put into creation. The saints follow this same pattern as the fulfillment of their mission on earth. As we walk with our Guru on the path, we can see a foretelling of the future according to these five states. You will be able to see how each one of us goes through a progression of consciousness. Through understanding these Sutras of *The Holy Science* you will have the ability to see where you are, where your friends are, and where your loved ones are on this journey of the heart - and this knowledge will help you to help your loved ones.

The five stages are:

1. Dark
2. Propelled
3. Steady
4. Devoted
5. Clean

There is a saying in India that everyone is seeking, whether they know it or not. Sri Yukteswar said that the dark cycle is the Kali Yuga state, and "whenever in any solar system man generally remains in this state and is ordinarily deprived of the power of advancing beyond the same, the whole of that system is said to be in Kali Yuga."

In this stage, man is unaware of the goal and purpose of life. He is in a state of ignorance. At the low end, there *is* evil, but most people are just unaware; they are not seeking. They are concentrated on material life, their mortal being, on the physical world - with no knowledge beyond the material.

In Kali Yuga, the various churches will say, "If you don't go to our church you can go to hell." (Laughter) But now we are in Dwapara Yuga. Interestingly, Pope John Paul II said that his

concept of hell is not as a physical place, but more a state of mind - a state of consciousness that is cut off from God. "Kind of like a place which offers equal opportunity damnation," Brother added. (Laughter)

Brother said, "My father was a man who was well-read and he liked to think deep thoughts. He was impressed when I decided to enter the path of monasticism, and one day asked me, 'Is there something you can give me to read?' I showed him all the teachings, and he picked ... the smallest book. (We all laughed heartily, because we knew the *smallest* book was the most difficult to understand - the tightly wound sutras of Sri Yukteswar's *Holy Science!*)

Later my dad reported back, "This is the best little book I ever read!" (Laughter)
"This really surprised me!" Brother told us. "Then I gave him the *big* book!" (Laughter)
But eventually, by the questions and comments his father made about the books, it became apparent to Brother that his father was not really understanding what it was all about.

As we emerge from the dark heart some very significant events take place, and you will recognize that those events have occurred in your own life. There is a personal karmic script playing out which is both universal and unique. We go through some kind of suffering - and it's a major episode - a major illness, or psychological despair, depression, alcohol or drug abuse. Now this is a mind that is sick - sick of delusion! And it is then that we finally begin to question - we begin to believe that there must be something more.

Brother remembered his own turning point. He remembers crying as he overlooked the Pacific Ocean and deeply asking, "How can I go on until I know the meaning of life?" Each one of us has experienced some kind of profound suffering, either in this life or in a past life, which has forced this question, or we wouldn't be here today. This is the *real* ticket to Convocation. (Laughter) It's a desperate searching for answers to the real meaning of life.

Master had to go through this suffering, too. What was that major episode? It was when he lost his mother. There was a lot of suffering. "It was the death of my earthly mother that led to my liberation in this life," Master said.

We all want to save our children from suffering, but *we can't save them from this*. There was a devotee who was afraid for his son, who was making mistakes in his life.
"Just be there for him, but he has to make his mistakes," Brother advised the father.
"He will have to have some profound suffering before he finds this path."

Brother got a call from the son one year later. "My dad died," he told Brother. "And I found my dad's *Lessons*, and I believe he wants me to study these *Lessons*."
"Are you wanting this for him or for you?" Brother asked.
"For me," the son answered. "I'm suffering."

This is the propelled state of heart - some kind of profound suffering that propels us to seek spiritually. The seeker's heart seeks for evidence to determine what is truth.

In India this is called the classic stage of inquiry. You have to be propelled; it's an essential prerequisite to get to the next stage. You have to seek on your own to begin. God doesn't reveal His secrets *until the soul really wants to know*.

Sri Yukteswar said, "When man becomes a little enlightened he compares his experiences relating to the material creation, gathered in his wakeful state, with his experiences in dream, and understanding the latter to be merely ideas, begins to entertain doubts as to the substantial existence of the former."

It is a real search for truth. It's a quest. We enter a period of deep personal questioning. We are reading everything spiritual, attending lectures, etc. - desperately searching for answers to our questions, because we sense the answers are there somewhere.

There was a man who was seeking for truth and he decided to attend a different church every week until he found the right one. He did some research to find out about all the various churches in his town and made a list of them all. He had his whole year planned out! (Laughter) Then on a brochure he saw Master's picture ... and he put *that* church as his first visit on his list. Some time after that first visit to the Temple he told Brother, "I felt a wave of peace, then an explosion of joy as I came to the altar. And then I heard a voice inside say, "Welcome home."

This is the "neti, neti" stage - "not this, not that." After that first visit to the Temple, his wife asked him, "What church are you going to next week?" He told her, "Oh, I threw the list away. I got lucky on the first try!" (Laughter)

In this propelled state we develop an increasingly urgent soul call going out from the heart: "Help me!" Master, as a young man, on the day he found his Guru had passed for hours in sobbing pleas, in spiritual anguish, making an intense soul call to God. Then suddenly he was interrupted by a divine voice, "Thy Master cometh today!" So, with this deep, intense soul call we make petition to God ... and God answers. Wherever we are, He responds with two gifts:

The first gift comes as some kind of confirmation. It may be a dream, or perhaps some intuitive knowledge conveyed to you. That is God confirming to you, "I am real. I am here for you." If you look back on your own life, you will see there was some point in time when you made a soul call - a deep organic prayer - and God gave you a confirmation. There was a spiritual crisis which propelled you to search and make that soul call, and then came some kind of confirmation from God.

Now the best gift of all comes. God sends the Guru. The Guru finds you, no matter where you are. You can be on vacation, you can be visiting relatives, your cell phone can be off! (Laughter) This applies to every single one of us here this week.

Lahiri Mahasaya first met his Guru in the Himalayas, after his job as a government accountant led him to being transferred to Ranikhet, near the Himalayas. His duties there were undemanding, and you can just picture him there, wandering around the Himalayas on

work time! (Laughter) For all we know, it's possible that the government paid for his initiation! (Laughter)

God responds to your soul call by sending the Guru. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Master told his disciples, "I recognize distinctly those whom I knew before." And to some he said, "Why did you wait so long?"

God has *picked* you. That applies to each and every one of us. God has picked you and has chosen a Guru for you. You may wonder why there are not more numbers of people at Convocation. *It's not so easy to get a ticket!!* (Laughter)

Sri Yukteswar said of this stage, "Man becomes able to appreciate what true faith is, and understands the real position of the divine personages when he is fortunate in securing the Godlike company of some one of them who will kindly stand to him as his Spiritual Preceptor, Sat-Guru, or Savior. Following affectionately the holy precepts, he learns to concentrate his mind."

As we move from the propelled state toward the steady state, many devotees temporarily fall away from the path. Why? We see that in the beginning so many devotees are so enthusiastic about the path. They come to the Temples, they come to the meditation groups - and then one day we don't see them anymore. If we call to inquire, they say, "Oh, I'm so busy."

What happened? *Karma*. There is some very strong karma going on that tempts them to change their mind. There is an article in the latest issue of *Ladies Home Journal* (August, 2005) about Elvis Presley, entitled "Elvis: His Secret Spiritual Search". In the interview, his daughter, Lisa Marie said of him: "My father's library of spiritual books is amazing. I've gone through those books. They're covered with his notes. He wrote on the top of the page, on the bottom of the page, on the margins - everywhere."

Brother added, "Elvis was propelled!"

His wife Priscilla said, "I have this picture in my mind: It's a clear sunny afternoon in Los Angeles, Elvis and I are on our motorcycles, roaring through Bel Air, down sunset Boulevard ... into Pacific Palisades. We stop at an idyllic retreat called the Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine."

Brother commented, "Now, wouldn't that make a great postcard - Elvis on his motorcycle roaring into Lake Shrine!" (Laughter)

Priscilla continues: "Elvis takes my hand and leads me through the grounds. For a long time, we sit in the meditation garden and focus our attention on our breath. I've never seen Elvis this calm. "It's what we all need," he says. "A break from the craziness."

Priscilla continues: "Some time later we were summoned to another retreat, the one that quartered Sri Daya Mata, the woman who assumed leadership of the Self-Realization Fellowship after the passing of Yogananda. She was soft-spoken and natural, a person

obviously at peace with herself. Elvis took to her immediately. Thus began an ongoing dialogue between Elvis and Sri Daya Mata that profoundly influenced his life."

Brother said that Daya Ma once told some of the monastics, "Elvis is such a sweet soul, but he is held hostage by his celebrity."

In the article, Priscilla said, "Elvis sought what could never be his - freedom from a world that worshiped him like a god."

Karma may be too powerful. It's tragic. But is the search over? No - it will go on, and the Guru will be there. Many fall away, but not forever. As Paul McCartney said, "It's a long and winding road."

In the next stage, the latter part of the propelled stage - comes initiation. The Guru tells us, "I can take you there. I can help you." The Guru makes promises, and he asks the disciple to promise to follow steadfastly. This is the beginning of the Kshatriya stage. We enter willingly into spiritual battle - and the Guru fights with us. It is then that everything shifts to a higher gear for the spiritual battle ahead, which prepares us for the steady heart. Loyalty is necessary. The Guru says, "I need to have you promise to follow me," and he tells us, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

In this state, Sri Yukteswar says that man comprehends his internal electricities. "Internal electricities" means prana. Pranayama!! We are initiated into the techniques of controlling the life energy.

As this propelled state comes to a close, we find ourselves in a revolution of personal change. We know we have to make changes. We realize, "I'm trapped. I need to make some changes." It's the law of spiritual progression. It's painful for us, and it's painful for our friends and family.

They say, "*Why* do you have to be so *weird?*" (Laughter) They blame you.
"If you would just be more *normal!*" (Laughter)

You are responding to a higher calling, and they cannot hear what you are hearing. But if you are open, if you are kind, if you are generous - then your true friends will rise with you to that next state.

Will there be strain in marriage? Oh yes!! You may have an angry, resentful partner.
"No more square dancing!" they complain. (Laughter)
"He's dropped out of the bowling league!" (Laughter)
"My wife says she loves Yogananda more than me!!" "*Who is this guy!?*" (Much Laughter)

There are karmic reasons why you're in this committed relationship. *Don't throw them away.* There are *vita*/lessons there for you. Those lessons in marriage relationships prepare you for the steady state of the heart. Be patient, be kind and loving, and be willing to make sacrifices - and if you do, you will find you are making an important contribution to your

partner's soul journey. It's worth the work! Later you will say, "I feel I've fulfilled God's will." A desire to serve arises - this is the virtue that arises as we enter the steady heart. We want to do service and good works to please God.

Sarah had for many years used her office to meditate at work for forty-five minutes each day. And there were always people coming and going in and out of Sarah's office. Word had gotten out and they would all say, "You know, it's really true! It's *really* peaceful there."

In the steady heart state you find that people are drawn to you, because you know how to listen; you know how to care. Others recognize the love of God growing within you. Sri Yukteswar said of this stage of the steady heart, "When this becomes the general state of human beings naturally in any solar system, the whole of that system is said to be in Dwapara Yuga."

"This is why it takes four thousand years!" Brother added. (Laughter)

In the steady state of the heart:

- The most important relationship is Guru and disciple.
- The most important life style is sadhana.
- The most important action is Kriya yoga.

It is then that a beautiful virtue blooms - it's what you might call "enlightened faith". It's part of the steady heart. Master says faith, or shraddha, is "the natural inclination of the heart toward righteousness".

Brother told us a story which illustrated just what "enlightened faith" means:

There was a mother who came to see Brother with her six-year old daughter. He knelt down to say hello to the little girl, and her mother said, "Tell Brother what you did today."

"I planted sunflowers," the little girl announced.

"Oh, that's wonderful!" Brother said. "How many did you plant?"

She held up ten fingers.

"And how many came up?"

She fumbled with her fingers for a moment and held up three.

"Do you think *all* the seeds will sprout?" Brother asked.

The little girl nodded energetically.

"How do you know?"

"Because mommy said so!"

So "enlightened faith" develops from a little spiritual experience and "my Guru says so."

Master says in the Gita, "He who is imbued with shraddha is consistent in the highest form of spiritual endeavor because he is motivated by an intense spiritual longing that has its basis in the intuitive conviction of faith."

Shraddha means love for the *Guru*, trust in the *Guru*. Faith and fear cannot coexist, so fear begins to leave, and that faith grows and grows until it becomes fearless, and becomes "the faith that can move mountains", as Jesus called it. "My *Guru* is taking care of me. My *Guru* is protecting me. My *Guru* is guiding me *all the time* - this is the signature of the steady heart. My *Guru* is guiding me, fulfilling all my needs. It is having complete trust in the *Guru*.

There was an Indian guru teaching a group of disciples gathered around him. He turned to one of the disciples and said, "You can leave now. Go travel around the world."

The disciple protested; "No, I want to stay with you!"

But his guru insisted, "No, you should go take a trip around the world."

Finally, the disciple stood up, walked once around his guru, and sat down again in the same spot. "I have just gone around my world," he declared. "You *are* my world."

There is a story about Krishna: Krishna was called away from his home in the village where the *Gopis* lived, in order to tend to affairs in another part of the kingdom. After being away for some time, Krishna learned that the *Gopis* were missing him greatly and were crying for him. Perceiving that his disciple, Udava, needed more bhakti, more devotion, Krishna sent Udava on the mission in his stead, to comfort the *Gopis*. Udava undertook the long journey, and as he rode into the village the *Gopis* saw him from a long way off and they danced for joy, believing it was their beloved Krishna returning. But as Udava drew closer the *Gopis* saw it was not Krishna at all and they cried over and over, "You are not Krishna! Where is Krishna?? We want Krishna!!" The *Gopis* would settle for nothing less than their Lord Krishna himself.

In the *Gita*, the blessed Lord said, "Those who, fixing their minds on Me, adore Me, ever united to Me with supreme devotion, are in My eyes the perfect knowers of yoga."

Sri Yukteswar said, "If man continues in the baptized state, remaining immersed in the holy stream, he gradually comes to a pleasant state wherein his heart wholly abandons the ideas of the external world and becomes devoted to the internal one."

So the heart turns within - and this is a quantum leap. To feel loved, to feel secure - we need others, we need the external - it's our human condition. But as we enter the devoted state, the heart is now inner directed, and this inner state of consciousness becomes stronger than environment and all other relationships. It allows us to transcend mortal dependencies, and a new relationship develops with the *Guru*.

The Bible says that the disciples of Jesus heard the call of his shepherding voice, and like sheep they followed him. The Book of John says that a master is a divine shepherd - "he *goeth before* them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."

Master says, "Devotees whose souls are consciously drawn to the guru and who remain in tune with his vibrations ('voice') are successful in following his leadership. In divine attunement with their guru, they intuitively feel his vibrations as they try to adhere to his guidance and emulate his spiritual example. When the spiritual teacher leads the consciousness of his devotees toward God in meditation, *he himself goes ahead of them* in deep ecstasy, calling them toward Cosmic Consciousness through the Holy Ghost vibration in his Christ Consciousness. Earnest devotees, meditating with their ecstasy-tuned guru or in spiritual attunement with him through practice of the methods he has taught them, gradually learn to follow his consciousness to liberation in Cosmic Consciousness."

Kriya yoga is the key that unlocks the door of the devoted heart and awakens recognition of the Guru's voice. Then in the silent stillness you will feel vibrations from Kriya yoga pranayama - you will feel these vibrations in the body, in the spine, and on the top of the head. As you concentrate on those vibrations - no matter how subtle they may be - as you concentrate on them with reverence, they will grow and expand, producing great joy and comfort. And there will come a time when you recognize, when you realize Gurudeva *as those vibrations*, and you will know, "My Master is here". Master manifests then in a very personal way for you. These vibrations *are* his presence, and we follow them. The Guru "*goes before us*" - that is what it means.

"When the spiritual teacher leads the consciousness of his devotees toward God in meditation, *he himself goes ahead of them* in deep ecstasy, calling them toward Cosmic Consciousness. Earnest devotees, meditating with their ecstasy-tuned guru or in spiritual attunement with him through practice of the methods he has taught them, gradually learn to follow his consciousness to liberation in Cosmic Consciousness."

The Guru is the divine shepherd that each one of us will have. Master is there for each one of us. This part of the spiritual path is incredibly beautiful. Master has been walking with us *always*. He becomes personally present for us in meditation, and eventually all the time. The omnipresent Guru becomes one with us.

"In this devoted state," Sri Yukteswar says, "man is then said to belong to the Vipra, or nearly perfect, class. This state of human beings is called Treta; when this becomes the general state of human beings naturally in any solar system, the whole of that system is said to be in Treta Yuga."

At long last we enter into the final stage - the clean heart. There is no diploma; it is something we feel within ourselves that is deeply personal. Sri Yukteswar says, "When the heart becomes purified, it no longer merely reflects but manifests Spiritual Light." The clean heart becomes a *source* of light, no longer dependant on the outside world. It is fearless, loyal, full of faith and service.

Daya Ma expressed it this way: "There is just that simple expression from the heart, and from the mind and the soul - 'I have nothing to ask, Lord; I have nothing to demand, I have nothing to say but this: I love you, and I want naught but to enjoy this love, to treasure it, to clasp it close to my soul, and to drink of it always. There is nothing in the world, there is

no power of the mind, there is no craving of the senses which draws my thought away from that simple avowal of my love for you."

Master calls this "transparency of heart." You are fully in tune with *Guru* and with *God*, and the *Guru's* work is finally done.

Shankara said, "No known comparison exists in the three worlds for a true *Guru*. If the philosopher's stone is assumed to be truly such, it can only turn iron into gold and not into another philosopher's stone. The venerated Teacher, on the other hand, creates equality with Himself in the disciple who takes refuge at His feet. The *Guru* is therefore peerless, nay transcendental."

This clean state of heart is immensely satisfying to both the *Guru* and the disciple. There is an equality between the two. Why do we love the letters that Master wrote to Rajarsi? Because they communicate that equality.

In the last few pages of *The Holy Science*, Swami Sri Yukteswar summarizes the five stages: "It has been shown in the foregoing pages how love may be cultivated, how by its culture it attains development, and when developed, through this means only, how man may find his Spiritual Preceptor, through whose favor he again becomes baptized in the holy stream, and sacrifices his Self before the altar of *God*, becoming unified with the Eternal Father forever and ever."

We are on a soul journey of the heart, step by step with the *Guru*. Spiritual advancement is not defined by phenomenon or powers, but by the unfoldment of these virtues in the heart. So ask yourself, "How can I deepen my relationship with my *Guru*?"

Sri Yukteswar ends *The Holy Science* with this:

"This little volume is therefore concluded with an earnest exhortation to the reader never to forget the great goal of life.

In the words of the illumined sage Shankaracharya: "Life is always unsafe and unstable, like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. The company of a divine personage, even for a moment, can save and redeem us."

The Life-Changing Power of Prayer

Friday Evening Lecture - Brother Santoshananda

Brother said, "Someone once asked me if I prayed before giving a Service. Maybe I should. (Laughter) We don't come to preach, but to serve and to find God. 'Thy will be done,' is our attitude."

A preacher's young daughter inquired, "Daddy, why do you pray on Sunday before Church?" The father explained, "I'm asking the Lord to give me a good sermon." The little girl replied, "Why doesn't he?" (Laughter)

Master said, "Most men consider the course of events as natural and inevitable. They little know what radical changes are possible through prayer."

We think most events in our life were preordained. "It's my fate; it's my karma," we say. But Master says, "No! *Au contraire!*" Everything and anything can be changed - through the power of prayer, meditation, and attunement with the *Guru* - including our destiny.

Actually we have two destinies. One is our individualized self-created, limiting karmic destiny as a result of prior choices that we have been creating from past lives. We may be born in a particular country because of the past. Brother told us, "I was born in Switzerland because of Swiss cheese and chocolate." (Laughter) "It's a karmic joke!" (Laughter) Everybody has different karma, and they are self-created situations.

However, all of us have the same divine destiny to go back to the source we came from - back to *God*. Master said, "This is why as mortal beings we are limited, but as a child of *God* you are unlimited."

So focus your attention on *God* and you will have all the power you need. Focusing your attention is what meditation and prayer are all about. Where is *God*? Way up in the sky? No. We have two centers to focus our attention where *God* is: our spiritual eye, and our heart. These are two physiological centers we can concentrate on. It's not abstract - these two centers are *real*. This is where you feel His presence.

"Pray in the language of your heart and soul," Master says. Feel deep in your soul, which wants to talk with *God*.

"The Light of All Lights, beyond darkness; Knowledge itself, That which is to be known, the Goal of all learning, He is seated in the hearts of all." (*Gita XIII:17*)

The Lord is in our hearts. For hours, *Guruji* would pray for his heart to open. "Door of my heart, open wide I keep for Thee." Jesus said to pray with all your heart, mind, and soul. St. Paul said, "Pray without ceasing."

Focus the attention in the right direction - this is the purpose of Convocation - to focus on what is most important in our lives. *Lahiri Mahasaya* said, "Solve all your problems through meditation." This is true, because then we are at a higher level of consciousness. When we meditate and pray there is a change of consciousness, and we see life on a different level.

Brother met a man in the bookroom who told him that he knew Master. One time he had a major problem with his business and so he went to Mother Center to talk to Master about it. When he got there, Master was meditating outside with some devotees. Master said to the man, "Sit down and meditate." After a while, the man felt great joy and bliss, and

afterwards he couldn't remember his problems! (Laughter) When he went home he found all his problems came back, but now he was detached and could handle them, and stand back from them. "Before, I was the problem because I was identified with them," he said.

Albert Einstein said, "Problems cannot be solved by the same level of consciousness that created them." We have to rise above them. That's the problem of the world - we try to patch up - scotch tape here and scotch tape there - (Laughter) and so we don't change because we are staying on the same level of consciousness.

What is prayer? It is to reconnect our soul from the source from which we came to a higher level of consciousness which is able to solve our problems. The more attuned we are, the easier it is. With God, everything is possible. There is a beautiful verse from the Gita: "I am the Source of everything; from Me all creation emerges. (Gita X:8) There is no separation between you and God - you are God's expression.

There was a young man in India who was worshipping a statue of Krishna. A missionary came and said, "Oh, my poor boy, why do you worship a statue? If you show me where God is in that statue I will give you an apple." The lad replied, "Show me where God is *not* and I will give you *two* apples." (Laughter)

God is present everywhere. If you take a piece of clay and make one statue of Krishna and one of the Guru, that is the expression of two ideas, but they are both from the same source of clay. So are *we*. There are no dividing lines. It is *we* who create differences and separation with our ego consciousness.

Babaji told his disciple Lahiri Mahasaya, "Few mortals know that the kingdom of God includes the kingdom of mundane fulfillments. The divine realm extends to the earthly, but the latter, being illusory, cannot include the essence of reality."

So here we are with our egos, creating separation between God and us. This is why we have to meditate - to erase that separation, that dividing line between God and us. Master said, "Matter was created, not to repress God, but to express God. Realize this!" Brother said, "It blew my mind - it blew away all the false ideas of what matter is. A little light came on - Wow!" It's when we pray and meditate that we erase that imaginary line, because we create attunement with God and Guru, and then we realize that all matter is the expression of God.

Remember "Hey Hari Sundara" - "O God Beautiful, in the forest, Thou art green." This is praying with open eyes - this is awareness of the presence of God in His expressions. There was a yogi who would wake up every morning and look at the flowers and the birds, and then he would clap his hands saying, "Well done! Encore! Encore!" Life is to be celebrated as a creation of God. Then we create more and more attunement.

The Bible in Genesis says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and it was good." God cannot create anything but good. He is God, after all! (Laughter)

In the Bible, the prophet Isaiah says, "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

God's intentions are peaceful and full of joy. In India they call His creation "Lila" - the divine dance, the divine play. It is God who entertains Himself. It's His hobby.

Remember how in the film, "*Glimpses of a Life Divine*", Master was in samadhi and he laughed and said to God, "Oh, what a joke You are playing on us!" But then he said to those disciples who were gathered around him, "But for you it is yet real," and tears came to his eyes. Master was so full of compassion. Being both divine and human, he saw both sides.

One day you will see what it's all about. There was a philosopher who said:
"Forgive, O Lord, the little jokes I play on Thee,
And I'll forgive the great big one you played on me." (Laughter)

Master would sometimes argue with God, "This may be your hobby, Lord, but what about your victims?" And God replied, "I have made all men in My image. If you know you are part of Me you can live in this world as I do and enjoy it with Me." Master said that this is the ultimate answer. We do not see the world as God sees it. When you are with God, life can be fun, but through delusion you are perceiving yourself as a bundle of flesh and bones, which at best is a nest of troubles.

Brother said, "Now, if you asked *me*, 'Why did God have this divine play?' I would tell you, 'Don't ask me; I just work here'." (Laughter) There *are* no answers; we cannot answer that question. There *are* no reasons for the play. If you play, do you need a reason? No. You just play. On the beach you see children building sand castles, and then you see them kick them down for no reason and walk away and go home. They *play!!* It's a play, but we don't see it because we are not attuned. We cannot answer that question on our ordinary level of consciousness. We must raise our consciousness to a higher level to know the answer.

One time some monastics asked Rajarsi if he would explain a certain verse from the Gita to them. Rajarsi said, "Oh, but first I have to meditate." He went to his room to meditate and came back later, full of bliss and joy. He told them, "If you want to understand this verse from the Gita, you have to come to where I am." Rajarsi did not want to give an intellectual answer and have them just be satisfied with that. You have to go beyond that level to get the answers to these questions. St. John was completely attuned with Jesus - he raised himself to that same level.

In a satsanga, Daya Ma once said, "In a deeper sense, prayer becomes a meditation at the same time. I don't pray for myself. I just say, "I love you", and go into samadhi." In India this is called "Japa Yoga" - singing the name of God.

Devotional chanting is a form of prayer. A saint said, "God listens to me when I talk to Him, but He loves it when I sing to Him." To repeat the name of God - chanting - is also a form of practicing the presence.

Ask yourself three questions:

1. Do you talk to God? Yes, but more importantly,
2. Does God talk to you? Yes, all the time God is talking to us. More importantly,
3. Are you listening to Him?

Master said, "Are you listening to the speaking voice of silent God?' His voice is not like in a Hollywood movie: "YOU BEHAVE NOW!" Brother mimicked in a loud, commanding baritone voice. (Laughter)

The mystics, the saints of all religions, say God is speaking to us all the time through love, joy, peace, wisdom. He speaks to us through His attributes. We must be still, we must reach the silence - we have to become silent to be open and receptive. Then you receive; you hear God talking. When you feel His love, His bliss, then He's not just a belief - you know through these attributes that He exists.

There is a story about a man who came to visit the famous biologist, Louis Pasteur. The man entered Pasteur's laboratory and found him totally absorbed, looking in his microscope. Not wanting to disturb him, the man quietly waited for a long time. Finally, Pasteur looked up and realized the man was standing there.

"Oh, were you waiting a long time?" he asked.

"Well, yes," the man said, "but I didn't want to disturb you because it almost looked as if you were praying."

"This *is* my prayer," Pasteur replied. "If I have any problems, I look in my microscope and they all disappear!"

He was a yogi without knowing it!! It was his church, his way of life.

"Church is the hive; God is the honey," Master said. We go to church to commune with God. Some people pray for things. Master says it's okay to do this, and if we are sincere He will answer our *needs* - not always our *wants*. If God answers in a different way than what you want, it may be better for you.

We may say, "But I wanted that, not this." But God is not a Cosmic vending machine - put coin in, push button. (Laughter) It doesn't work that way. It is when you have attunement with His will that all things are added unto you.

Santa Monica was the mother of St. Augustine. Now, before his conversion, Augustine was a very worldly person. Perseveringly, night after night, Santa Monica prayed for her son, and one day Augustine changed!

In his now famous "*Confessions*", Augustine wrote of the struggles he went through in being drawn by earthly delights, and in praying to God, "Free me from this temptation, but not right now." (Laughter)

Finally he became enlightened, and realized, "Behold, You were within me, and I was outside, and there I sought for You." After that, one time Augustine met up with an old friend who asked him, "Don't you recognize me?" Augustine answered, "Yes, but it is not I anymore; it is Christ in me." It's our *ego* who is creating all the sources of our problems.

In a time of misfortune, Master said God told him, "By being happy, My child, thou dost please Me." That's beautiful! You please God when you are happy. It's a win-win situation!

Brother said he made a formula of three simple words to remind him of God: Happy, Healthy, Samadhi. God wants us to be happy, and so we are. God wants us to be healthy, and so we are. God wants us to be in samadhi, and so we are. If tests come, we can use this formula to help us. Most of our prayers in SRF are affirmative prayers. God is always first. We affirm what we believe - we affirm the truth. For example, take the Energization Exercise prayer:

"Heavenly Father, it is Thou who dost directly sustain my body. Awaken within me conscious will, conscious health, conscious vitality, conscious realization."

In other words, you are saying to God, "I'm asleep. I don't have this realization. Awaken me." As you practice the exercises, you come to understand the meaning of the prayer.

"O, Eternal Youth of body and mind ..."

This is good for the seniors - see grey hair in mirror; say *quickly* "O Eternal Youth!" (Laughter) We get identified with "I'm getting old", and it seems like sometimes we are being punished for something we didn't do! (Laughter)

"Abide in me forever and forever."

That cosmic energy trickles down into every cell and is very beneficial for us.

It says in the Bible (Malachi 3:10) "...prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Master wants to give you everything. He is limitless. If you come with a little cup, that's what you will get. If you come with a bucket, that's what you'll get. He wants to give us *everything*. He is here for the taking! Master said, "God is knocking on the gate of your hearts to build in you a garden of happiness."

There was a saint who prayed to God, "One more day has passed, and still you have not answered." And God said, "Who do you think made you pray all this time?" God is all the time trying to make us feel His presence! For prayer to be answered, we must attune

ourselves to the Consciousness that can answer! The more attunement we have, the more we receive.

There is a poem, "A bell is not a bell until it is rung, a song is not a song until it is sung, and Love is not love until it is given away."

This is why after meditation Master recommends that we pray for others, and also for healing of the world. After meditation, Master always invoked God's blessings for others. You may ask, "What can I do to help the world?" Do what Master asked us to do - pray. *It's our spiritual duty to do it.*

"I am the Source of everything; from Me all creation emerges." (Gita X:8) Aum is the vibration from which all vibration emerges. When we attune with the Aum vibration in prayer, that vibration knows where to go, and you just become the instrument.

Master said, "The channel is blessed by what flows through it." When you pray for others and perform Master's healing technique, you know God is working through you and you forget the self and only others exist. We become a participant, and at the same time we feel that divine presence of Aum we can share that healing vibration with the world, invoking peace and brotherhood, and greater wisdom among all nations.

Brother Santoshananda ended his talk by leading everyone in a healing service. The power of several thousand devotees chanting "Om" was unbelievable.

Taking Convocation Home with You

Saturday Closing Class - Brother Achalananda

Convocation goes very fast, doesn't it. On the way over here, we got a phone call from Daya Ma, and she asked us to convey to all of you her love and her blessings. She mentioned that these Convocations give an opportunity to both the monastics and the lay disciples to spend some time with one another, and to deepen that bond of friendship with each other - because we really *are* all one large spiritual family. Isn't it true that we never feel a sense

of strangeness - there's just that feeling that we have come home ... and that is because we are.

How can we go on through our lives taking God with us through life? In the deepest sense, God is omnipresent, so wherever we go, He's there! On the other hand, it's helpful to remember that though God is everywhere, we are not always aware of God. It's good to do things to keep that awareness - sharing with our Guru our life and activities and all the duties of everyday life.

How to keep that consciousness of sharing our lives with God? In the West it's called practicing the presence of God. In the East it's called Japa yoga. We bring our attention back to God again and again. As we go on with our duties, as we encounter the pressures of every day life, it's so easy to get caught up in the outward drama and forget to keep the inner connection. The ultimate is when we are aware of that Divine Presence all the time, so that effort is no longer necessary.

I encourage you to make the effort to deepen your personal connection with your Guru. It's so important. Guruji has shown us the way to attain that state of higher consciousness, and we have the opportunity - through Convocation, through Master's books and talks, through Master's life *itself* - to learn how to connect and have enough determination to find God. As you leave and return to your homes, take with you what you've learned at this Convocation - the experiences, the talks, the pilgrimages, the deeper absorption of the techniques of meditation, the spiritual friendship that has been here, and the understanding that devotion is a part of the path. Practice the presence to keep the consciousness centered and uplifted so that you are not dragged back down into everyday life.

We didn't come here just to live and die. Life has a deeper purpose, and we should not forget that purpose, but strive to fulfill it. Guruji has given us what we need, so it comes down to one thing: perseverance. One of Lahiri Mahasaya's favorite remarks, given as encouragement for perseverance, was "Banat, banat, ban jai", and my translation of that is, "Keep on keeping on."

Life is hectic, and you may seem overwhelmed as it goes sweeping by so fast. The pace can be overwhelming. Trying to find time for spiritual practice is sometimes difficult. It's hard to stay with it and to keep our peace and calmness. This is true with both householders and monastics, too. Just because we are in the ashram doesn't mean the world has left us alone! (Laughter)

We have to learn to use our time better. We need to plan our lives better. I remember when all those computers and electronic gadgets first became available. People thought, "Oh, everyone will have so much more spare time!" Ha, ha, ha! It's been exactly the opposite. It turns out that all these timesavers have only laid another burden on us because *they use time up!* To keep our peace, I can see why Babaji sent these teachings at this time! Dwapara Yuga has just started, and we *need* it!

Work, families, children, etc require time - it's a struggle. To keep from being frazzled, we need to plan at least *some* time for spiritual effort. It means developing a routine. Routine makes life easier. The word "routine" comes from the French "rute", which means a beaten path, breaking down the weeds and bushes in order to have a path to move.

Don't expect that once you've established a routine that you'll be able to follow it every single day. You can only do the best you can. Just try to follow it enough so that you get at least *some* meditation in.

One time Daya Ma was addressing a large group, and even as they were leaving she continued to talk - no doubt she intuited the pressures they felt in their lives, and she must have picked up on their thoughts because she said, "Can't you give God at least fifteen minutes? ... Can't you give Him ten minutes? ... Can't you give Him five minutes?"

"Even five minutes will make a difference," Brother said, "but try for twenty."

Daya Ma said, "Lot's of people, because their minds are restless, don't really want to meditate. They will use rationalization in order to justify that inner, maybe unconscious unwillingness to meditate. But let us always face truth as it is. Art forms can inspire, but they do not take the place of direct God communion."

No one ever said life is easy. It's a constant struggle, and always will be. That is the nature of creation. Creation always has struggle within it. As you meditate more and become focused, those struggles will still be there, but your ability to cope with them becomes easier.

Most of mankind is flowing with the outward current of creation. Those of us who are turning back toward God are struggling against this powerful outward current. As long as we are centered on the outward senses we are with the outward flow. In meditation we learn to go against the stream; we are going back home instead of outward into the play. Because, what comes at the end of that stream? A waterfall! (Laughter) So we want to get *away* and to go upstream. Don't let life carry you along like a leaf on a stream.

Use Master's philosophy; use his teachings. No matter how busy you are, take a few minutes every now and then to refocus on the Guru. Brother told us, "When I was new on the path, before I came into the ashram, my work at McDonnell-Douglas as an engineer required all my attention. So once in a while I would spread out a blueprint on my desk and lean down over it with my hand shielding my eyes. Now, others would have assumed that I was just looking closely at the blueprint, but unknown to any one else I was in fact looking at the spiritual eye and chanting mentally "Om, Guru, Om Guru" for a minute or two. We can all do this, but it is a habit we have to create."

"After I came into the ashram, I worked in the printing department. One hot day I was running the press, printing envelopes. There was no air conditioning, and no screens, so opening the windows would let the flies in. Well, there were these flies around, really

attacking my face - they were really bugging me! So I found a ruler - a steel ruler that was flexible and strong and I thought, "I bet I can bend that ruler back and let it go, and if my aim is really good, that fly will be history! (Laughter) And actually, it worked pretty well! Then I heard a voice behind me, "Don't you have anything better to do?" (Laughter) I turned around and saw Brother Bhaktananda departing from the scene. He probably didn't want to stick around for my excuses! (Laughter) But he let me know that I was off base, and left. Then I realized that I was practicing the presence of the fly!! (Laughter)

How often do we all do that? Instead of having God in our minds, we are caught up in some mundane thing. All that is required is to shift your attention to God now and then, and to learn to recognize that subtle Presence that is always there.

Master said, "A common cause of spiritual discouragement is the devotee's expectation that God's response will come in a great blaze of awe-inspiring inner illumination. This erroneous notion dulls the devotee's perception of the subtle Divine responses that are present from the very beginning of one's meditative practices. God responds to the devotee's every effort, every devotional call. Even as a novice, you will realize this in your own seeking if you learn to recognize Him as the quiet, inner peace that steals over your consciousness. This peace is the first proof of God's presence within. You will know it is He who has guided and inspired you to some right decision in your life. You will feel His strength empowering you to overcome bad habits and nurture spiritual qualities. You will know Him as the ever-increasing joy and love that surges deep within, overflowing into your everyday life and relationships."

Master said one time, "Through the centuries I had been seeking God, and still He didn't answer me. But I said, "Lord, someday you will come." I didn't care how long I had to wait. I knew that through every noble desire He was with me; every good thing that I have done, He was with me. Still, I was calling Him, though He was so near."

We have the tendency to put God far away, instead of realizing that He is right within us. Christ said, "The Kingdom of God is within you." But we have to increase our knowing.

Make a loving demand to God, particularly after the techniques of meditation. Pray lovingly, "Lord, reveal Thyself! Lord, reveal Thyself!" But it can't be mechanical. We want to routine-ize our life, but not our spiritual efforts! When we talk to God, we must make it a yearning, a call of the heart and soul, so that soul-call will attract the divine response. If we are looking all around, we are not really connecting with God. If it just comes from the surface, can we really expect a response from God? It must be a loving demand, "Come! Come! Come to me!" If tears come, it's okay. Tears wash away the mud of delusion. Cry for God if necessary. Long for God. We have to show Him we mean business!

Brother said, "When I was first on the path I received many beautiful outer spiritual blessings. Master was probably thinking, 'Okay, here's this skeptical engineer; I really have to prove it to him'. (Laughter) So he gave me these deep experiences to set the hook deep right from the beginning. But as a result I had the expectation that those beautiful experiences would always be there. Then after I came into the ashram those experiences disappeared. I came to realize that Master was saying, 'All right my child, now *earn* it.' Quite a bit different from just getting it free!" (Laughter)

Then I reached a point of a bad dry spell which lasted for one and a half years. Finally, I spoke with my spiritual counselor, Brother Anandamoy. "What the heck is going on? It's all work!! I meditate in the morning and it's work, then I go to my job and it's work, then I meditate again in the evening and it's more work!"

Now, Brother Anandamoy doesn't sugar-coat his pills. (Laughter) "What are you meditating for?" he asked. "Is it for God, or is it for the consolations of God?" I thought to myself, "Uh-oh." I saw I'd fallen into the trap of expectations. I went back into meditation and had a heart-to-heart talk with Master and told him, "I realize my folly, that you can't bargain with God like a shopkeeper." (Laughter) "I can't have the attitude, okay I did so many Kriyas and now You have to show up." (Laughter) My job is to meditate and make the effort. What comes to me is Your job. Whatever You send, I accept; I will receive it with love."

"Life didn't change right away,' Brother continued, "but three or four months later I started to feel a little peace ... and boy, it felt soooo good! Then after twelve years in the ashram I had a 5 ½ year dry spell. 'What am I doing wrong?' I thought. At first I thought I was stuck on some plateau, but then when it went on and on, I began to think I was going backwards - regressing. But we're *not!!* Even if you have no results, you *are* progressing as long as you are making the effort. It's just that we don't see the tiny increments that are happening every day.

So I just kept doing what I could. Then something most interesting happened. One day, suddenly from one moment to the next, I felt my consciousness change - just like that. And I realized I wasn't the same person anymore. After that, one time I happened to be talking with a young man who had a very good perception of people and he said to me, "Oh! Something's changed! Ya, and it's kinda nice too!" I thought it was interesting that he had noticed, and considered it as proof that it wasn't imaginary, but real.

Daya Ma said, "As we grow in understanding and in our love for God, we hasten the development of those around us: children, wife, husband. However, it is not necessarily by our words that we can best influence others. Very often, if we try to convert family members, it causes much misunderstanding. If someone in your family is not following the spiritual path, it is wrong to try to pressure that individual into accepting your beliefs. Each person must unfold, as each flower, in his or her own time. You cannot force a seed to become a flower in one day."

The search for God is individual and very personal. Don't make family members feel uncomfortable if they are not on the path. The best way to change them is to change ourselves.

There were two lady devotees who lived in the same city and they knew each other. Each one had been meditating and just doing their own effort. Then they met at Convocation. "What are *you* doing here?" they said in unison. They had no idea the other was a member! (Laughter) Then the thought came to both of them, "What can we do to get our husbands involved? Let's ask Brother Paramananda." So they sought him out, and when Brother found out what they had in mind he said, "Hey, I'm outta here!"

The best way you can change another is to change yourself. On the other hand, you never know when God will intervene and change someone else. Two teenage boys were left with their Grandmother while the parents were away. The parents called to see how they were all doing and the Grandmother told them, "I've been in your meditation room. I read that blue book ... and something happened to me." (Laughter) Now I'm going to read that great big orange book." (Laughter) We never know when God will change somebody and help someone come to greater understanding.

And we don't realize to what extent that changing ourselves will affect others. Brother said, "When I was still working at McDonnell-Douglas, a friend of mine at work asked me after I'd been practicing the *Lessons* for about six months, "Hey, what do I have to do to get those *Lessons*?" "Why do you ask?" I inquired. He told me, "Anything that can change you that much in six months I have to find out about." (Laughter) And he did ... and he's now Brother Dharmananda! (Laughter)

"For many years I never asked Brother Dharmananda what change he saw in me, but finally one day at Hidden Valley I asked him. He smiled and said, 'I saw you weren't so arrogant anymore and that you were starting to think of others and not just yourself'."

Twenty-five years ago, a 75 year old nun got permission to talk of her experiences with Guruji. She said in those days the monastics did not have any formal training program. They just went to work. It was on-the-job-training. She had just arrived at Mother Center and was looking around the main building. Then she went to a small library, closed the door, and was looking at some books. Guruji came, stuck his head in the door and said to her, "Talk to me, prove me. Talk to me, prove me. Talk to me, prove me." Then he closed the door and was gone. What was he telling her? How did he know she was even there?

Master said, "I know your thoughts. I know your feelings. I know very wisp of feeling you have." A true Guru knows it all. The more we can deepen our attunement and that personal relationship with the Guru, the more our life changes.

Brother said, "At first I didn't realize the depth of connection; the necessity of making that relationship deeper and more meaningful. I thought, 'Okay, I'm in the ashram - what more can I do?' Eventually I realized that I had to make the effort to deepen it personally. *I needed to invite God in.* We have to share our lives with Him; we have to make Him a part of that life. Whenever I am going to give a lecture, first I go to the altar to pronam, and I always talk and pray to Guru. I tell Him, 'I have nothing I can give to these people. But You have everything. Let your love, wisdom, peace, and joy flow through me. I am your instrument. Use this instrument!' And you know, I found He will. He will."

In the Bible it says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

When you "stand at the door and knock" - this is the door right here. (Brother pointed to the Christ Center) It's also called the gate, Shiva's eye, the morning star, the star of the East - there are many names.

And when it says "if any man hear my voice" - that is when you hear that peculiar rumbling sound of Aum - that sound has a particular knocking or rumbling sound. If you become aware of that, then you must open the door to God. Opening the door is something *we* have to do - He's not going to knock it down! (Laughter) How do we open the door? Not by the techniques, but by *devotion*. The techniques get us to the door. Devotion, surrender, opens the door. It's often hard to surrender. We must surrender the ego.

When we "sup" with each other, we partake of the same nourishment - our consciousness is elevated and spiritualized. That's what we are all seeking, whether we know it or not. It's something we can all do.

"One other thing," Brother said, "The whole magic of success in any endeavor is *perseverance*. "That's why I took the motto 'keep on keeping on'. And I told my Guru, 'I promise you, I'll never give up.'"

Why lie there on the ground and worship your mistakes? (Laughter) Secretly, we use our mistakes as an excuse not to do any more, and then we stick it on the altar, and occasionally take it down and beat ourselves with it!" (Laughter) If you made a mistake - apologize, ask forgiveness - and then move on and forget about it.

Brother said he struggled for years, but couldn't overcome a particular fault. Finally he said to Daya Ma, "I give up! I gave it all to Divine Mother and She is going to have to do it for me." Ma sent a letter the very next day - Brother said he never got a response so quickly! (Laughter) "Get in there and *fight!*" Ma said.

You can't run away. You must continue to make the effort - and *it works!* If we refuse to give up, sooner or later we *have* to succeed. If you fail, get up and keep trying. It's as simple as that. It says in the Gita, "Fight the battle of life or you will acquire sin." We have to fight the delusion. So, as you go back to your homes, make the effort. Keep trying, even if it's only five minutes.

Brother said, "I'll tell you a story, just to show how we are capable of changing with our own effort, and with the blessings of the Guru. Before I came into the ashram I was very disillusioned with life. I was to the point where, I was not thinking suicide, but I know why people do.

Then after several years in the ashram I became depressed. At that time I was working in the print shop, spreading gloom everywhere I went. (Laughter) One day Brother Dharmananda, no doubt noticing my mood, greeted me, "Hello Smiley!" (Laughter)

I was furious; I thought, "How *dare* he call me 'Smiley.'" (Laughter) Then a very interesting thing happened: I thought, "Hey, wait a minute - he's your *friend*. He's trying to *help* you." Then I asked myself, "Why am I in this terrible mood?"

An interesting answer came: "Because you *like* it! You must, because you've held onto it for three days now!" It was then that I used every ounce of energy and willed with a very strong thought: "Get *out!!* Get out and *never come back!*" My mood was instantly gone and I've never had another one since!

"You can change a habit pattern in an instant," Master said. It takes all your willpower, but it can be done. But so often we cling to our moods. It's as if we get some kind of perverse joy out of it or something. But with just one supreme effort - and this is unusual, but it can be done - with one supreme effort we can change that habit. Usually it takes a long time, but we *do* have the power to change.

Each one of us is a child of God and has the strength, the power, and the understanding to succeed in life and in the divine quest to find God. He is not hiding from us - it is we who are avoiding God - we are hiding from Him. Just introspect and see the ways we hide from Him every day. How often do we ignore Him? How often do we pay no attention to Him?

Did you ever ask yourself *why?* Why do I do this? If you are honest, see what answer comes up, because that will show you what to do about it. Then we have the opportunity and blessing to overcome what's holding us back. We are still caught in delusion to some extent. That's why we are here.

We are on the path to freedom. Master said that you do not get a technique like Kriya yoga in the beginning of your spiritual search; you get it at the end of your spiritual search. Don't be like the child who goes to the movies and wants to see the same movie over and over again. The time comes when we want to leave the movie. Keep on keeping on, and at some point Divine Mother will say, "Alright, My child, you've played around enough - it's time to come Home." Then we can go home ... and it will be blissful.

St. Paul said, "I protest by our rejoicing which I have in Christ ... I die daily." He was able to "die daily" by meditation. So let us meditate and practice Master's teachings so that we become oblivious to delusion so we can go back Home.

Om, Peace, Amen.